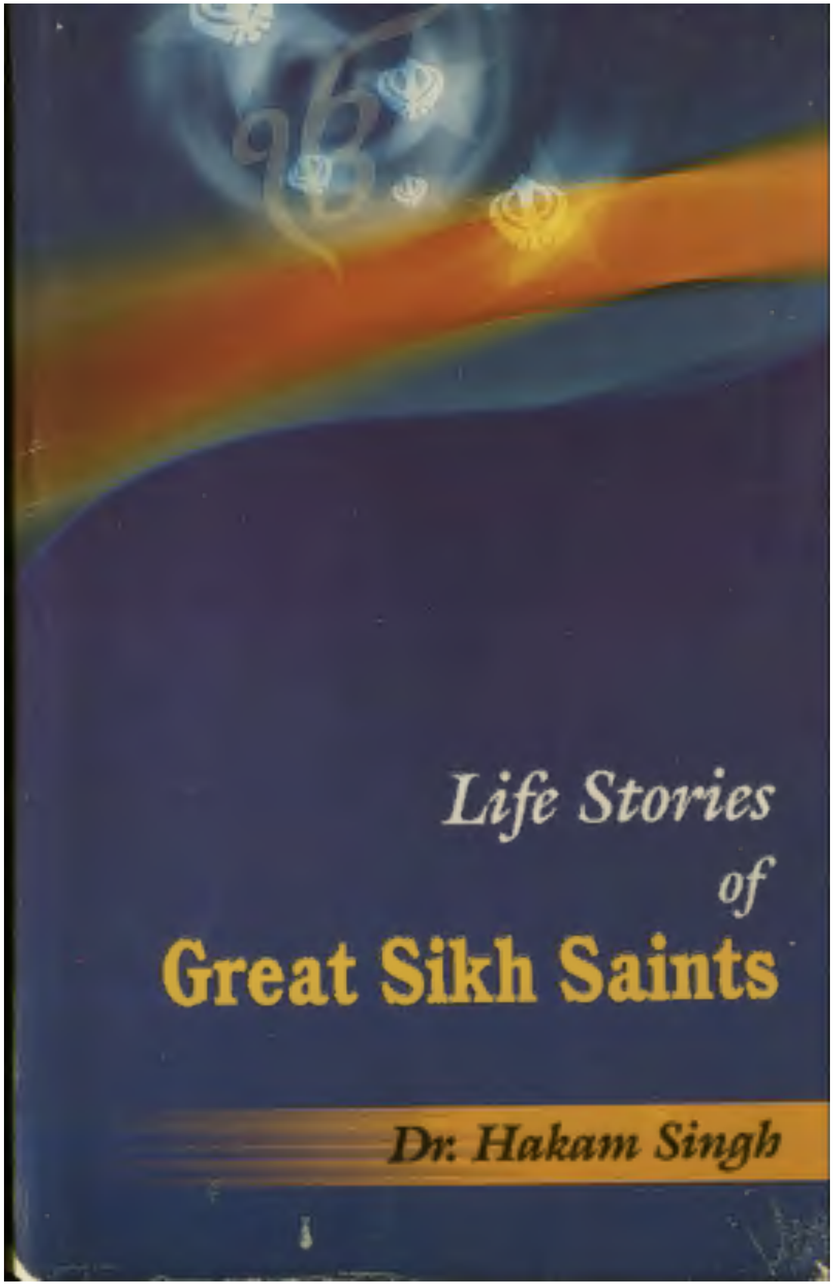
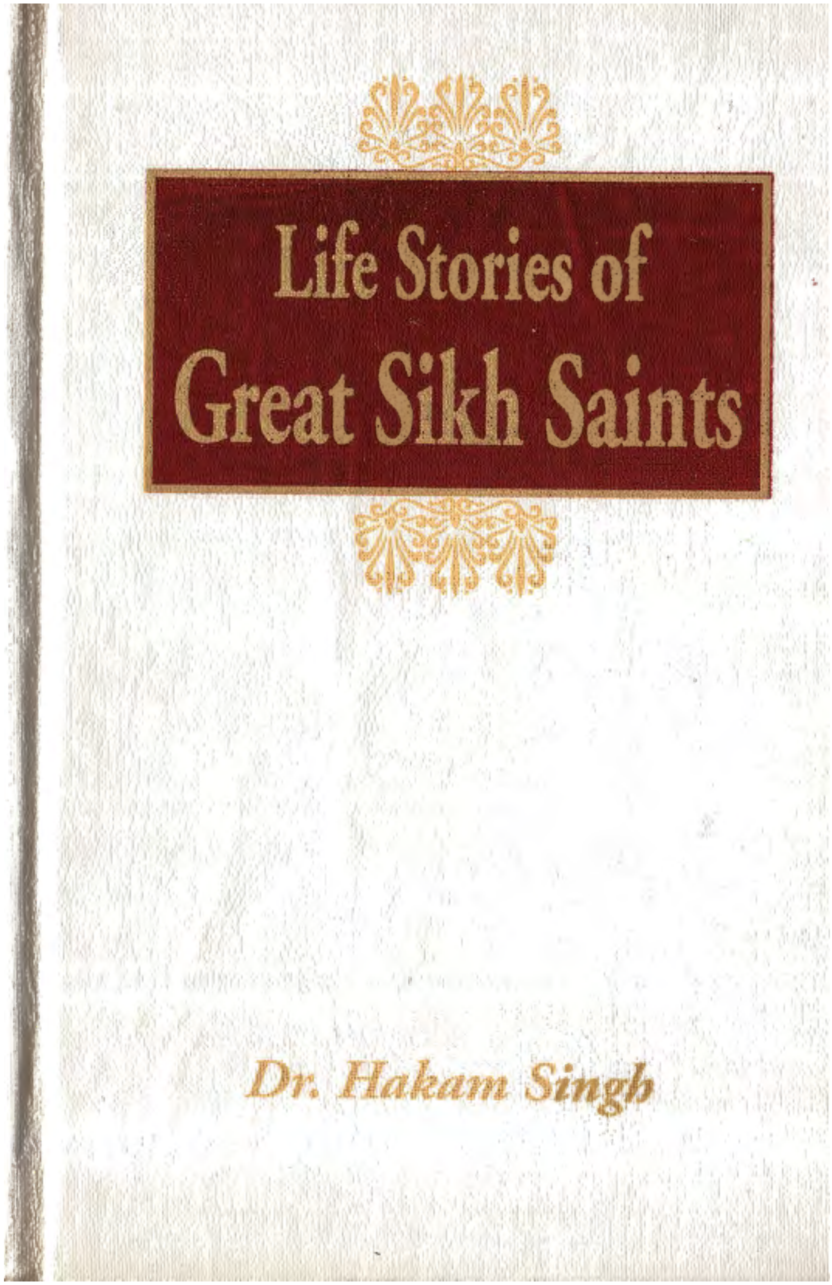


Life Stories of
Great Sikh Saints

Dr. Hakam Singh

"Lives of great men all remind us, we can make our lives sublime".

After the passing away of Guru Gobind Singh and a century of great turmoil for the Sikhs, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries produced many Sikh Sants who by leading their lives strictly according to the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib, not only themselves achieved high spiritual status but with their influence braught many to the correct path of Sikhi. Brief life histories of some such immaculate souls is included in this book.



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Life Stories
of
GREAT SIKH SAINTS

By

Dr. Hakam Singh
Sikh Welfare Foundation of North America

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Dedication

This book is respectfully dedicated to
Sant Sujan Singh Ji
at whose feet I learned what our Gurus have said
about the real meaning of a Sant.

INTRODUCTION

According to Mahan Kosh (P. 243) the term 'Sant'[1] is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Saant' or 'Shaant', which means (spiritually) poised, or someone who is emancipated from 'self'. This in turn means that he has kept mental as well as physical feelings under control.

From the time of Aryans there had been a tendency among people to seek the truth about existence, which, it was believed, could be achieved by extreme asceticism - by fasting and tormenting oneself. Some such people who took to asceticism and succeeded in attaining a state of equipoise were known as "Sants". As the time went by this term started being used more loosely and gradually came down to a point when anyone who took to ascetic life and wore a certain colour and style of garb was called a "Sant" irrespective of his spiritual level. Even before and during the Guru period there seems to have been no dearth of such so-called "Sants". The mention of such 'Sants' also comes in Guru Granth Sahib. For example Kabir says:

ਗਜ ਸਾਢੇ ਤੈ ਤੈ ਧੋਤੀਆ ਤਿਹਰੇ ਪਾਇਨਿ ਤਗ॥
ਗਲੀ ਜਿਨ੍ਾ ਜਪਮਾਲੀਆ ਲੋਟੇ ਹਥਿ ਨਿਬਗ॥
ਓਇ ਹਰਿ ਕੇ ਸੰਤ ਨ ਆਖੀਅਹਿ ਬਾਨਾਰਸਿ ਕੇ ਠਗ॥ ੧॥
ਐਸੇ ਸੰਤ ਨ ਮੋ ਕਉ ਭਾਵਹਿ॥
ਡਾਲਾ ਸਿਉ ਪੇਡਾ ਗਟਕਾਵਹਿ॥ (SGGS, P. 476)

"Those who wear 'dhotis' of three and a half yards and three-ply sacred threads - they display rosaries around their necks and have polished jugs in their hands, they are cheats of Benaras, not the 'Sants' of God. I do not like such (so called) Sants who devour the trees along with their stems".

In Sawaiyyas of the Bhatts, bard Bhikha also writes about such imposter Sants:

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[1] Throughout this book the word Sant has been used and not its English equivalent, saint. Also, in Guru Granth Sahib the terms 'Sadh' and 'Sant' have been used synonymously, but all quotations given are those pertaining to 'Sant'.

ਰਹਿਓ ਸੰਤ ਹਉ ਟੋਲਿ ਸਾਧ ਬਹੁਤੇਰੇ ਡਿਠੇ॥
ਸੰਨਿਆਸੀ ਤਪਸੀਅਹ ਮੁਖਹੁ ਏ ਪੰਡਿਤ ਮਿਠੇ॥
ਬਰਸੁ ਏਕੁ ਹਉ ਫਿਰਿਓ ਕਿਨੈ ਨਹੁ ਪਰਚਉ ਲਾਯਉ॥
ਕਹਤਿਅਹ ਕਹਤੀ ਸੁਣੀ ਰਹਤ ਕੋ ਖੁਸੀ ਨ ਆਯਉ ॥ (SGGS, P. 1395)

"I have searched throughout and seen 'Sants', of many kinds, the recluses, the men of austerities and sweet-talking Pundits. I wandered for a full year but no one gave clue (to the true way). Even though they were eloquent in speech, the conduct of none of them appealed to me".

But there still must be some genuine 'Sants' because in Guru Granth Sahib there appear a large number of 'Shabads' (hymns) in praise of a 'Sant'. Fifth Master, Guru Arjan Dev has devoted two full "Ashtpadis" about 'Sant' in "Sukhmani Sahib". SGGS, P 262-296.

Today it seems that such imposter 'Sants' have proliferated. By putting on a particular type of dress they announce through a few of their hired agents that they have reached the exalted state of poise - are capable of showing miracles. They call themselves 'Sants'. However, in reality they are out to extract money from innocent and gullible people. Several cases of fraud, perpetrated by such so-called 'Sants', on innocent believers have recently come to light. This has resulted in a total loss of credibility of almost every person who calls himself a 'Sant' or who is called a 'Sant' by his followers.

Several articles on this subject have recently appeared in some Sikh publications[2]. One such publication has even written:

> "For a Sikh there is only one 'Sant' and that is Guru Granth Sahib. A Sikh calling himself a 'Sant' is not only not a Sikh, he is enemy of Sikhi -----[3]".

There is no question that Guru Granth Sahib is the super most 'Sant' (if there are any categories of Sants). Also anyone who calls himself a 'Sant' is probably not a 'Sant' in reality, because a true 'Sant' (according to the definition given in Guru Granth Sahib) will be humble and never claim to be a 'Sant'. However, to say that the "only" Sant is Guru Granth

---

[2] Sikh Bulletin, Dec. 2000, P.19.
[3] Ibid, March 2002, P. 1.

Sahib may be a bit too hasty a statement given without finding out what Guru Granth Sahib has to say on this subject.

The term 'Sant' has been used in several different contexts in Guru Granth Sahib where it comes for over one thousand times. A large majority of Shabads (hymns), wherein this term comes, are in praise of piety and high spiritual state of a 'Sant':

ਤੂੰ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ ਸੰਤ ਤੇਰੇ ਨਿਰਮਲ॥ (SGGS, P. 108)
"You (O Lord) are free of rancour and Your 'Sants' are immaculate."

Or about the capability of a 'Sant' to transform a sinner into a true devotee of God:

ਸੰਤ ਜਨਾ ਮਿਲਿ ਪਾਇਆ ਮੇਰੇ ਗੋਵਿਦਾ ਮੇਰਾ ਹਰਿ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਸਜਣੁ ਸੈਣੀ ਜੀਉ॥
(SGGS, P. 174)
"Divine Master! I have found the Lord, my friend, in the company of 'Sants'."

In many 'Shabads' this term is used to address a gathering in a general sense meaning good or holy people or devotees:

ਕਹਤ ਕਬੀਰੁ ਸੁਨਹੁ ਰੇ ਸੰਤਹੁ ਅਬ ਐਸੀ ਬਨਿ ਆਈ॥ (SGGS, P. 333)
"Kabir says, hear you holy people such is the state of affairs now"

or

ਹਰਿ ਬਿਨੁ ਸਭੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਮੈਲਾ ਸੰਤਹੁ ਕਿਆ ਹਉ ਪੂਜ ਚੜਾਈ॥ (SGGS, P. 910)
"Without God everything is impure, o holy people, what offering should I lay before Him?

and

ਸੰਤਹੁ ਸਾਗਰੁ ਪਾਰਿ ਉਤਰੀਐ॥
ਜੇ ਕੋ ਬਚਨੁ ਕਮਾਵੈ ਸੰਤਨ ਕਾ ਸੋ ਗੁਰ ਪਰਸਾਦੀ ਤਰੀਐ॥ (SGGS, P. 747)
"O holy people, this is how one crosses the ocean (of material existence). Whoever practices the word of 'Sants', is ferried across by the Guru's Grace".

There are also some 'Shabads' that profess synonymy of God, Guru and Sant:

ਰਾਮ ਸੰਤ ਮਹਿ ਭੇਦੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਨਾਹੀ ਏਕੁ ਜਨੁ ਕਈ ਮਹਿ ਲਾਖ ਕਰੋਰੀ॥
(SGGS, P. 208)
"Between God and 'Sant' there is no difference - such (devotee) is one in millions".

and

ਹਮਰੋ ਭਰਤਾ ਬਡੋ ਬਿਬੇਕੀ ਆਪੇ ਸੰਤੁ ਕਹਾਵੈ॥ (SGGS, P. 476)
"My spouse (the Lord) is the great discerner, He alone is called 'Sant'".

also

ਹਰਿ ਕਾ ਸੰਤੁ ਸਤਗੁਰੁ ਸਤ ਪੁਰਖਾ ਜੋ ਬੋਲੈ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਬਾਨੀ॥ (SGGS, P. 667)
"The true Guru is the Lord's Sant, a true being, who utters Divine Words".

The fifth Master, Guru Arjan Dev has devoted two full "Ashtpadis" in Sukhmani Sahib on the subject of "Sant". The purpose of Guru Arjan Dev was definitely not self-aggrandizement but to emphasize the importance of persons he calls 'Sants'. However, in these 'Ashtpadis" he has not given the attributes of a 'Sant' by means of which one could be recognized. One has therefore to search further to find if the term 'Sant' has been defined in Guru Granth Sahib.

Fortunately there are a few 'Shabads', which clearly and unambiguously indicate who is a 'Sant' and what his attributes are:

ਜਿਨਾ ਸਾਸਿ ਗਿਰਾਸਿ ਨ ਵਿਸਰੈ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮਾਂ ਮਨਿ ਮੰਤੁ॥
ਧੰਨੁ ਸਿ ਸੇਈ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਪੂਰਨੁ ਸੋਈ ਸੰਤੁ॥ (SGGS, P. 319)
"Those who with every breath and morsel do not forget God's Name and keep this Word in their minds, they alone are blessed and are perfect 'Sants', says Nanak".

The fifth Master, Guru Arjan Dev has also given an elaborate definition of a Sant:

ਆਠ ਪਹਰ ਨਿਕਟਿ ਕਰਿ ਜਾਨੈ॥ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਕਾ ਕੀਆ ਮੀਠਾ ਮਾਨੈ॥
ਏਕੁ ਨਾਮੁ ਸੰਤਨ ਆਧਾਰੁ॥ ਹੋਇ ਰਹੇ ਸਭ ਕੀ ਪਗ ਛਾਰੁ॥ ੧॥

ਸੰਤ ਰਹਤ ਸੁਨਹੁ ਮੇਰੇ ਭਾਈ॥ ਉਆ ਕੀ ਮਹਿਮਾ ਕਥਨੁ ਨ ਜਾਈ॥ ੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ॥
ਵਰਤਣਿ ਜਾ ਕੈ ਕੇਵਲ ਨਾਮ॥ ਅਨਦ ਰੂਪ ਕੀਰਤਨੁ ਬਿਸ੍ਰਾਮ॥
ਮਿਤ੍ਰ ਸਤ੍ਰੁ ਜਾ ਕੈ ਏਕ ਸਮਾਨੈ॥ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਅਪੁਨੇ ਬਿਨੁ ਅਵਰੁ ਨ ਜਾਨੈ॥ ੨॥
ਕੋਟਿ ਕੋਟਿ ਅਘ ਕਾਟਨਹਾਰਾ॥ ਦੂਖ ਦੂਰਿ ਕਰਨ ਜੀਅ ਕੇ ਦਾਤਾਰਾ॥
ਸੂਰਬੀਰ ਬਚਨ ਕੇ ਬਲੀ॥ ਕਉਲਾ ਬਪੁਰੀ ਸੰਤੀ ਛਲੀ॥ (SGGS, P. 392)

"Day and night a 'Sant' realizes the Lord close (to him). He accepts God's Will as sweet.
Only Name of the Lord is the support of the 'Sants'. They consider themselves as the dust of the feet of all. Brother! Listen to this way of the 'Sants'. To describe their greatness is beyond my power. Name (of the Lord) alone is their way of life. God's praise, the embodiment of bliss, is their rest. To them friends and foes are alike. Other than God they acknowledge no one else. They erase millions of sins, dispel anguish and bestow Divine life. They are heroes - true to their word. Poor 'Maya' is deluded by them.

Thus according to the teaching of Guru Granth Sahib anyone who possesses these attributes is a 'Sant'. The Gurus, no doubt, did possess all these attributes and therefore can be categorized as Sants. But then the Gurbani also says:

ਪੂਰਾ ਗੁਰੁ ਅਖੵਓ ਜਾ ਕਾ ਮੰਤ੍ਰ॥ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਦ੍ਰਿਸਟਿ ਪੇਖੈ ਹੋਇ ਸੰਤ॥ (SGGS, P. 287)
"If the perfect Guru, whose word is eternally true, casts his ambrosial sight on someone, he (that person) becomes a 'Sant'."

For example, when Guru Nanak, the perfect Guru, cast his ambrosial sight on Bhai Lehna, he became Guru Angad, the Sant. During their lives the ten Gurus must have cast such ambrosial sight on many deserving Sikhs who became Sants. They may not be known as Sants in the Sikh history but the truth of Gurbani cannot be denied. Also as mentioned above one of the important attributes of a Sant is humility. Therefore one who is in reality a genuine Sant will not claim to be one. It is only the imposters with an urge of self-aggrandizement, who will want to have this title attached to their names and publicized.

When one searches Gurbani to see if the term 'Sant' has been used for any particular person one finds that it has actually been used with at least two names. Kabir has used the term 'Sant' for himself in one of his hymns that has been accepted by Guru Arjan Dev and included in Guru Granth Sahib:

ਕਿਆ ਅਪਰਾਧੁ ਸੰਤ ਹੈ ਕੀਨ੍ਹਾ॥ ਬਾਂਧਿ ਪੋਟ ਕੁੰਚਰ ਕਉ ਦੀਨ੍ਹਾ॥ (SGGS, P. 879)
"What sin has the 'Sant' committed, that he is bound into a bundle and thrown before an elephant"?[4]

In another hymn of Kabir (also included in Guru Granth Sahib) the term 'Sant' has been used for Prehlad:

ਸੰਤ ਪ੍ਰਹਲਾਦ ਕੀ ਪੈਜ ਜਿਨਿ ਰਾਖੀ ਹਰਨਾਖਸੁ ਨਖ ਬਿਦਰਿਓ॥ (SGGS, P. 856)
"He (the Lord) preserved the honour of Prehlad, the 'Sant' and destroyed Harnakhash with His nails".

Thus according to the teaching of Gurbani, it is quite possible to have Sants other than the Gurus. It is difficult to say if any such Sants do exist today, but to say that no such persons, other that the Gurus, have existed in the past nor they exist today, is a rather hasty statement that does not pass the test by the touchstone of Gurbani.

The litmus test of a Sant is that he would not want this title attached with his name and his only teaching would be to consider Guru Granth Sahib as the only Sant and the Guru today.

The present book, which is the first of a series, comprises short biographical sketches of some blessed souls who lived in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, led their lives according to the teachings of Gurbani and who would pass with flying colours the test prescribed by Guru Arjan Dev for a person for being called a Sant.

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[4] In this hymn Kabir is telling the story of how because of complaints against him by some Mullahs and of Brahmins of Benaras for his so called blasphemous utterings, he was sentenced to death by trampling under an elephant.

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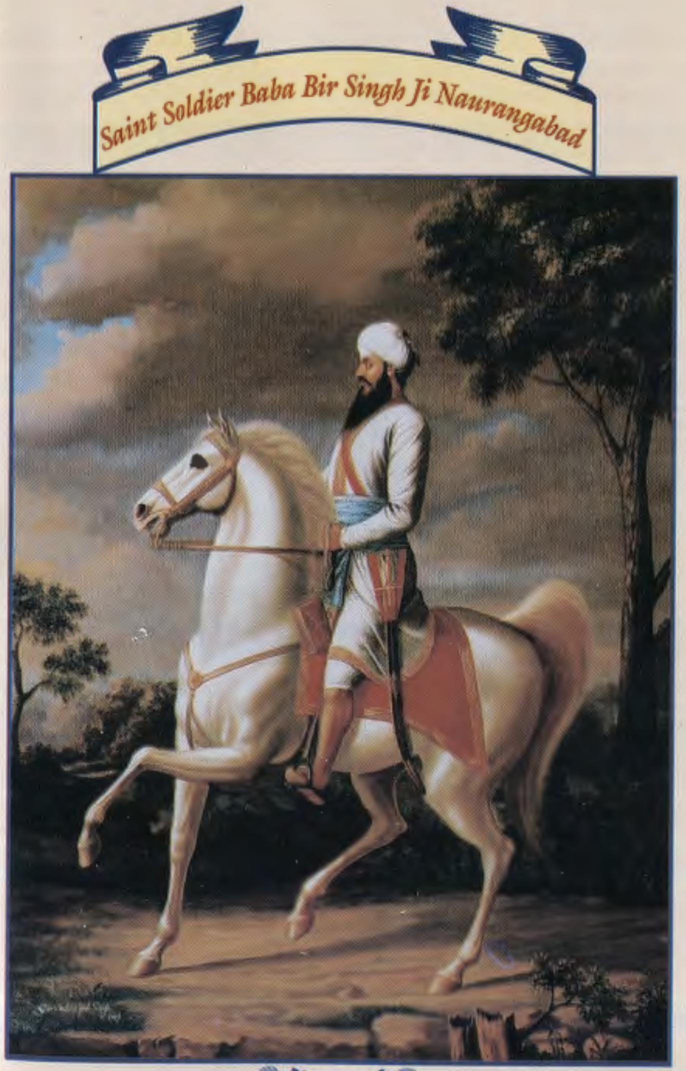
Saint Soldier Baba Bir Singh Ji Naurangabad

SAINT SOLDIER BABA BIR SINGH JI (OF NAURANGABAD)

In July of 1768 AD (Saawan 1825 Bik.) in the village Gaggo Bua, district Amritsar, in the peaceful and tranquil home of Bhai Sewa Singh and Mata Dharam Kaur a very unusual baby took birth. The mother was amazed at the easy and painless birth of the baby that took place even before the arrival of the midwife for the delivery. The baby did not cry at its birth which was a quite worrisome to the mother. However, when the midwife arrived and declared the baby to be normal and healthy, every one was overjoyed.

The news of birth of this unusual baby soon spread like wild fire throughout the whole village. Everyone came to see the baby and congratulate the parents. All felt that the time of fulfilment of the boon of Sixth Nanak, Guru Har Gobind[1], had arrived. They were now convinced that this baby would be the emancipator of all inhabitants of the village. In a traditional Sikh ceremony, when the baby was forty days old he was taken to the local Gurdwara where he was given the name Bir Singh.

At a relatively young age Bir Singh was sent to the local 'Dharamsal' (Gurdwara) for education[2]. In a short time, which even the Granthi could not believe, Bir Singh was able to read Guru Granth Sahib fluently. After that, he studied advanced books on Sikh history and philosophy. He had a very sharp intellect and a great capacity to assimilate whatever he read or was taught.

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[1] According to Sikh tradition, the sixth Guru, Hargobind, during his missionary tour of Majha tract of Punjab in the late twenties or early thirties of seventeenth century visited the village Gaggo Bua. The villagers gave the Guru a royal reception serving sumptuous 'langar' and making his stay as comfortable as they could. At the time of the Guru's departure, they also offered some choice horses and sturdy fighters for his army. Pleased with the selfless service rendered by the Sangat of this village, Guru Hargobind gave a blessing to the village. He said, "A blessed soul would take birth in this village in whose langar thousands of needy people would eat everyday". The Guru further said that on birth, unlike other usual babies, this one would not cry but smile.

[2] Those days the Granthis (priests) in the Gurdwaras were the teachers also. They imparted basic education in language and arithmetic and taught the students to read and understand Guru Granth Sahib.

With great love and care Bir Singh was brought up according to the Sikh tenets to be a physically as well as spiritually healthy person. By the time he reached adulthood he was a strong young man who was also a devout Gursikh. He recited all the morning and evening prayers regularly and attended the daily Gurdwara services.

Bir Singh's family was proud of its martial tradition. His father, Bhai Seva Singh, and uncle, Bhai Gurmukh Singh, were both employed in the Khalsa army. After the death of his father in the battle of Multan, Bhai Bir Singh was invited to fill his vacancy. The family gladly agreed to Bir Singh's desire and he got himself enlisted in the cavalry. At that time he was about thirtyfive years of age.

After serving in the army for about four years, he came on leave to his village. One night, while he was there, a group of dacoits assaulted the village. Bhai Bir Singh led a group of young villagers and bravely fought the dacoits and chased them away. The news of his bravery and leadership soon spread and reached the ears of Maharaja Ranjit Singh who invited him to his court and rewarded him handsomely for his bravery.

As already mentioned, right from the beginning Bhai Bir Singh led his life strictly in accordance with the Sikh tenets. He was kind and honest and always remembered Akaal Purakh (God). He had a firm belief that God was always close to him and was there to protect him. He remembered a large number of passages of Gurbani (utterances of the Gurus) and recited them regularly. His fellow soldiers respected him for his immaculate character and spiritual aptitude.

Another Sikh soldier in Bhai Bir Singh's platoon, Chanda Singh, was also from Gaggo Bua who was senior to Bhai Bir Singh in age. He had similar religious and spiritual leanings. The two became friends and often sat and meditated together whenever they found some free time. After some time Chanda Singh, who was a disciple of Baba Bhag Singh of Kuri, decided to leave the army and devote his life to the service of fellow human beings at the Dera (head quarter) of Baba Bhag Singh. He urged Bhai Bir Singh to come to the Dera (of Baba Bhag Singh) whenever he could, and meet with Baba Ji. He assured Bhai Bir Singh that his visit would be mentally satisfying and spiritually fulfilling. Somehow, these last words of Bhai Chanda Singh got engraved in Bhai Bir Singh's mind. He felt that his life's purpose was attainable only by meeting with Baba Bhag Singh.

When Maharaja Ranjit Singh sent an expedition under the command of Sardar Nihal Singh Attari to Kashmir, Bhai Bir Singh was included in the army selected for this purpose. In the battle that ensued, Bir Singh fought valiantly and the enemy was defeated. After this victory Sardar Nihal Singh along with his army was posted in Peshawar. While at Peshawar a fierce tribe of Pathans at the town of Panj Tara rebelled. A battalion of army was dispatched to subdue the insurgency. Bhai Bir Singh was included in this battalion. He fought with great enthusiasm and during the battle advanced alone, ahead of his fellow soldiers. On seeing him alone and at a considerable distance from his fellow soldiers a group of insurgents surrounded him. While he was fighting, his sword broke into two pieces. His companions saw this unfortunate event and lost all hope of his survival. At that time he prayed to Akaal Purakh (God) to help him get safely, out of the encirclement of the enemy. Amazingly, although he did not know what happened and how it happened, he found himself back with his own companions. Everyone said it was a miracle. This episode had a very profound effect on his life. He developed an unshakeable faith in Akaal Purakh and from that day onward, he started spending as much time as he could in meditation and recitation of Naam (God's Name). Soon he felt that the service in the army did not give him enough time for his spiritual pursuit. He therefore requested for a discharge from the army[3].

After leaving the army Bhai Bir Singh returned to his village where he completely immersed himself in meditation on Akaal Purakh and recitation of Gurbani. In whatever spare time he had, he went to the local Gurdwara to devote himself to the service of visitors. One day a group of pilgrims on their way to pilgrimage of various Sikh sacred places, was passing through his village. The weather suddenly changed and it started raining heavily. The pilgrims were forced to stop there in the Gurdwara. Bhai Bir Singh took upon himself to prepare food and serve to the group. While trying to start the fire to prepare the food, he realized that all the firewood in the Gurdwara was completely soaked with water and it was not possible to start a fire and cook the food quickly enough for the hungry pilgrims. He immediately went to his house and demolished the room in which he was staying, took the dry wood (construction material) thus obtained and used it to start fire for the preparation of food to serve to the hungry pilgrims.

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[3] Bhai Bir Singh's bravery and loyalty was well known to every one in his regiment including the officers. They also knew how truthful and pious he was. Being aware of his piety and spiritual pursuits, they did not want to lose such a soldier and tried to dissuade him from his decision by promising him promotion and other perks. But Bhai Bir Singh had made up his mind. When he saw that his request was not being granted he told his commander that he would leave whether or not the permission was granted. The commander asked for his recruitment records but did not find any. He was so impressed by this incident that he not only allowed Bhai Bir Singh to honourably leave the army, but also let him take with him his horse and weapons.

When Bhai Bir Singh's mother saw this, she was enraged. She said to him, "Ever since you have returned from the army you have not gone with your brothers to work in the fields even for one day. You have been a burden on the family and now you have started destroying our property also. We do not have a place for a good-for-nothing son like you. You can go wherever it pleases you because your stay in this house is a burden on the family". On hearing these angry words of his mother Bhai Bir Singh smiled and said, "Dear mother! Your word is my command. I am grateful that you have allowed me (though in anger) to adopt a path in my life that I had been contemplating for quite some time". He then left his home and went to the 'Dera' of Sant Baba Bhag Singh at Kuri. On meeting and talking to Baba Ji he got satisfaction of mind and spiritual fulfilment. He decided to stay there and carry out service (seva) of Baba Ji and visiting devotees.

For one full year, Bhai Bir Singh completely devoted himself to such service. Baba Bhag Singh was very pleased at the selfless dedication of Bhai Bir Singh. One day Baba Ji called him and advised him that in order to achieve the ultimate spiritual fulfilment he should go to Baba Sahib Singh Bedi of Una who was a renowned mystic of that time[4].

Bhai Bir Singh left the Dera at Kuri and arrived in Una (a town in the foothills of Shivalik hills in the northeastern part of Punjab). He met with Baba Sahib Singh and explained to him the purpose of his visit. Baba Ji was very impressed with his humility, pleasant demeanour and noble thoughts and gave him the duty in his *'langar'* (community kitchen). Bhai Bir Singh immediately immersed himself completely in the service given to him. The sumptuous food prepared under his supervision in the langar and the warm welcome offered by him to the visiting devotees pleased everyone. All the pilgrims served by Bhai Bir Singh generously praised him to Baba Sahib Singh.

One day Baba Ji called Bhai Bir Singh and said, "Your humility and selfless service has pleased Guru Nanak who has accepted you in his court by bestowing on you the exalted position of a Sant. Now you should travel around the country and spread the message of the Guru. Your fame shall spread far and wide and the words uttered by you will have the power to win over innumerable people".

In 1808-09, Bhai Bir Singh left Una and returned to his village where he started living in a hut by the side of a well outside the village. His brothers were still very angry with him. They often taunted him because he had given up his job in the army from where he regularly received his salary, which was a great help to the family. Now he was neither doing any work nor was he helping his brothers in the farming of their land and was therefore a burden to the community. His mother though angry, sometimes came to him, brought food and gently advised him to help his elder brothers even in some easy farming chores. This he started doing.

One year there was no rainfall. As a result the crops started dying. Bhai Bir Singh's brothers thought of repairing the Persian wheel on the old well in order to draw water for irrigation of fields. They asked Bhai Bir Singh to go to the nearby town and bring some earthen pots for the Persian wheel. Bhai Bir Singh went to the town, but instead of going to the store to buy the pots he went to Baba Sahib Ditta, a famous mystic who was in charge of the local Gurdwara and was known to make miracles. Bhai Bir Singh explained to Baba Sahib Ditta the purpose of his visit. After listening to Bhai Bir Singh, Baba Ji gave him an earthen pot and said, "You are blessed by Baba Sahib Singh and are yourself a miracle maker. Take this pot to your village and fill it with water. In whichever field you will sprinkle water out of this pot, rain will start falling there". When Bhai Bir Singh returned to his village with only one earthen pot, his brothers and mother ridiculed him, saying that he was indeed a good-for-nothing lazy bum. Ignoring them, he took the pot to a nearby field, closed his eyes, thought of Baba Sahib Ditta and sprinkled a little water while saying a prayer to Akaal Purakh. Soon it started raining heavily in that particular field. He then moved to another field and then another field and repeated the process with the same result. Everyone in the village was amazed at this miracle. The villagers developed great respect for Bhai Bir Singh and from that day onwards he became known as Sant Baba Bir Singh.

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[4] Baba Sahib Singh Bedi was a direct descendent of Guru Nanak Dev Ji.

Following the orders of Baba Sahib Singh Bedi, Baba Bir Singh moved to the village "Marhi" near Amritsar, where he started his mission of holy congregation and the service of humanity. Soon his reputation spread far and wide. Around 1811, the congregation of Naurangabad, a town about four miles from Taran Taaran, under the leadership of Bhai Dasaundha Singh, humbly requested him to carry out his missionary work in their town. Baba Bir Singh agreed to their request and moved from Marhi to Naurangabad.

The reputation of the pious and magnetic personality of Baba Bir Singh spread not only in the area adjoining Naurangabad but in the whole Punjab and neighbouring states. A large number of devotees and sants of all denominations started visiting him daily in order to listen to his sweet discourses on Gurbani. His langar (common kitchen) served over a thousand visitors daily without any discrimination of caste or creed. Even Maharajah Ranjit Singh, the ruler of Punjab, came to see him several times and partook food from the langar. He was so impressed with Baba Bir Singh's immaculate character and Gurbani discourses that he offered a large estate to meet the expenses of the langar. Baba Bir Singh, however, politely declined the offer saying that it was "Guru ka Langar" and should not run on the donation of a single person - every one should contribute his/her share according to one's capacity and ability.

After a few years, on a request from some local devotees, Baba Bir Singh started the project of building a Gurdwara to accommodate the large number of visitors that had started coming there everyday. It was a very ambitious project and on the day the foundation stone of the building was laid, some cynics openly expressed doubt about the completion of such a large project because at that time there was a

scarcity of building materials. Baba Bir Singh, however, had full faith in Akaal Purakh and never doubted the success of this holy task. As soon as the devotees in the adjoining areas heard of the project, all needed materials and labour appeared without any solicitation. In an amazingly short period of a couple of months, a splendid building was completed. Now large congregational gatherings with Keertan, Gurbani discourses and langar were held in the new building complex.

In 1833 CE a terrible cholera epidemic struck Naurangabad and adjoining areas. Hundreds of people started dying. At that critical time, Baba Bir Singh urged all his devotees to go around and help those who were stricken with this horrible malady. Hundreds of people came to his Dera (head quarter) to take refuge because proper hygienic conditions were observed there. Many lives were thus saved. The water of the well that Baba Bir Singh had got dug earlier was believed to possess miraculous powers. Many people came to take water from this well and it is said that those who drank this water actually got cured of cholera. Even Baba Sahib Singh Bedi sent his devotees from Una to fetch water of this well. He also sent his blessings and praised the noble work of Baba Bir Singh. But with great humility Baba Bir Singh said that it was all due to the blessings of Baba Sahib Singh Ji, whose orders he (Bir Singh) was following.

When Maharajah Ranjit Singh planned to visit the Dera of Baba Bir Singh for the first time and the latter came to know of the intended visit, he sent one of his devotees to the Maharajah with the message that the Maharajah was most welcome to visit the Dera, provided that:

1. He does not bring any offerings or gifts (of an estate) because the Dera was run only on the contributions of common people.
2. He sits in the langar with everyone else to partake the food blessed by the Guru.

The Maharajah readily agreed to both these requests and visited the Dera. He was immensely impressed by the immaculate life and high spiritual level of Baba Bir Singh. A prominent Sardar, Lal Singh from Gujranwala, who had accompanied the Maharajah, was so impressed by the spiritual atmosphere at the Dera that he bequeathed all his estate to the Dera and himself spent all the rest of his life there serving the congregation.

Anecdotes about the rich and famous of the times becoming devotees of Baba Bir Singh abound in the Sikh folklore. One such legend speaks of a famous learned man, Pundit Siam Singh, who on hearing the reputation of Baba Bir Singh, came to see him. He thought to himself, that in this age of Kali it was almost impossible to attain a spiritual level that people associated with Baba Bir Singh. He thought that he would be convinced only if Baba Ji addressed him by his name and offered him money for milk and almonds. Miraculously, when he came and bowed before Baba Ji, he addressed him (Siam Singh) by his name and then, gave him five rupees and told him to go and buy almonds and milk for his nourishment. The Pundit humbly touched the feet of Baba Ji and begged for his forgiveness for having doubted his spiritual level.

Baba Bir Singh was a very generous and even-tempered person. No one had ever seen him angry. His close devotees knew that if anyone inadvertently made a mistake, Baba Ji would smilingly tell him that he had hurt his (Baba Ji's) feelings, but that he would readily forgive the wrongdoer. Once when he had gone out of the Dera, two ascetics, whose clothes and feet were dirty, came there. Without taking anyone's permission they entered the personal room of Baba Ji and lay down on his bed. Baba Ji's devotees were incensed, but considering the visitors to be holy people, they did not take any action. When Baba Ji returned and saw the two sadhus lying on his bed, he wiped their feet with a clean piece of cloth and massaged them with great humility. With great devotion, he then asked one of his devotees to bring food for the two sadhus. The visiting sadhus were overwhelmed with the humility of Baba Bir Singh and bestowed their blessings upon him before leaving.

Like a true Sant, as defined in Gurbani:

ਸੰਤਨ ਅਵਰ ਨ ਕਾਹੂ ਜਾਨੀ॥
ਬੇਪਰਵਾਹ ਸਦਾ ਰੰਗਿ ਹਰਿ ਕੈ ਜਾ ਕੋ ਪਾਖੁ ਸੁਆਮੀ ॥ (SGGS, p.711)
God's devotees recognize no one other than the Lord.
They on whose side is the Lord, ever remain carefree - imbued in His colour (love).

Baba Bir Singh was forthright and carefree. He did not hesitate to

express his true feelings to those around him specially, when they concerned a Sikh tenet. To get the Guru's message across was his only aim in life and he conveyed the message without any hesitation. This aspect of his nature is illustrated by the following story:

> Once, together with about three thousand of his devotees, he went on a pilgrimage to the Dera of Baba Bhag Singh at Kuri. On reaching Gujranwala, Sardar Jawahar Singh, the son of Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa, served food to Baba Ji and his entourage. At the end of partaking food, it is customary for holy people to say a supplication for the blessing of the family or person who has provided and served the food, to Akaal Purakh. Baba Ji, in his supplication, thanked God for providing such a sumptuous repast and blessed the servants of the family for preparing and serving the food. Sardar Jawahar Singh was surprised that his name was not even mentioned in the supplication. Baba Ji read his mind and said, "Jawahar Singh! The provisions belong to Almighty God and I thanked Him for that. Similarly your servants put in all the work in preparation and serving of the food and I did give my blessings to them. You did not do anything therefore your name did not come to my mind". Thus, Jawahar Singh was made to understand that the true service involved not in just providing funds for materials but in true devotion.

Immediately after the death of Maharajah Ranjit Singh in 1839, the Khalsa Raj was in turmoil. Sandhawalia Sardars and Dogra brothers (Dhyan Singh and Gulab Singh) each started to grab the political power. Similarly, across the river Satluj, the British who had already gained complete influence over the cis Satluj Sikh states of Patiala, Nabha etc., were scheming to grab the Sikh empire. Because of this political tussle, law and order was completely absent. Baba Bir Singh, an ascetic, who had great love for the country and for justice for everyone, played the role of a true patriot at that time.

During those days, Baba Bikram Singh Bedi of Una, in a family feud with his nephew, Baba Attar Singh, killed him, grabbed his estate and made prisoners, the members of his family. When Baba Bir Singh came to know of this high handedness of Baba Bikram Singh, he sent a word to Baba Sampooran Singh, who was then the only surviving male member of

Baba Attar Singh's family, but was so despondent that he was contemplating suicide by self-immolation. Baba Bir Singh assured Sampooran Singh that he would try to get justice for the family of the deceased.

In November 1840, Kanwar Naunihal Singh became the victim of a conspiracy of the Dogra brothers. His untimely death was a great blow to his mother, Rani Chand Kaur. Baba Bir Singh went to Lahore to see the Rani for condolence. When he met Rani Chand Kaur, while condoling her on the loss of her son, he also mentioned that in her reign, atrocities were being committed. Security and safety of public were non-existent. Innocent people were being killed and perpetrators of such heinous crimes were bragging openly because they had money and could buy political power. He then told the episode of murder of Baba Attar Singh and the intention of self-immolation of Baba Sampooran Singh who, inspite of his repeatedly knocking at the door of her government, had not succeeded in obtaining justice. Baba Ji then added that if a ruler fails to grant justice to his/her subjects sooner than later his/her reign is doomed to end.

On hearing these prophetic words, Rani Chand Kaur was shaken up. She immediately discussed the matter with Maharajah Sher Singh and a battalion of soldiers was dispatched under the command of general Ventura to take appropriate action. General Ventura raided Una and forced Baba Bikram Singh to release the members of Baba Attar Singh's family and return his estate to Baba Sampooran Singh.

When Baba Bir Singh was leaving Lahore, Rani Chand Kaur tried to offer, as donation for the Dera and a large sum of money and clothes for his entourage. Baba Ji declined to accept any of it, saying that he had only come to offer his condolences and seek justice for an innocent and victim family, which the Rani had very kindly provided immediately. For that, he said, he was indebted to the Rani.

Baba Bir Singh went on pilgrimage to Amritsar and Nanakana Sahib several times. Whenever he embarked on such a pilgrimage, thousands of devotees accompanied him and many more came to listen to his impressive sermons. He always preached that a true Sikh was one who acted on the advice of the Gurus as delineated in Guru Granth Sahib. His sermons had such magnetic power that thousands of people who listened to him came into the folds of Sikhism.

Once he went to the town of Rajasansi. Thousands of devotees were accompanying him. The Sardars, on the pretext of a hunting expedition, left town when they heard that Baba Ji had such a large entourage with him. As he reached the town he was met with a servant of the Sardars with a message from their wives. The Sardarnis, according to this message, had expressed their inability to come to greet him because they could not expose their faces in the presence of so many people. However, they would send sufficient provisions for the preparation of food for Sant Ji's entourage and had requested that Baba Ji should have the food prepared by his own men. Baba Ji sent his reply to the Sardarnis saying, "The tradition of hiding face in the congregation was condemned by the third Master, Guru Amar Das. You are therefore violating a Sikh tenet. Time is coming when you will be forced to live in horse stables in the presence of *syces*, and will not be able to stay sheltered behind the walls of your palaces." This prophecy of Baba Bir Singh came out to be true soon.

While Baba Bir Singh was at Lahore, he got the news that his mother, Mata Dharam Kaur was critically ill. On hearing this, he immediately started for his village along with several of his close devotees including Sardar Jawahar Singh Nalwa and Sardar Attar Singh Sandhawalia. His elder brother, Jhanda Singh, accompanied by many respectable persons from the village, came to receive him.

On reaching home Baba Bir Singh went straight to the room where his mother was lying on her (death bed). Mata Dharam Kaur on seeing her long separated son, got up in spite of her precarious health condition and in a weak voice said, "It is good to see you, Bir Singh. I had almost lost all hope to see my pious and spiritually accomplished son before departing from this world and ask him to pray for my emancipation. But thanks to Akaal Purakh, my last wish has been granted". Baba Bir Singh replied, "Dear mother, you have led the life of a true Gursikh. Already you have been free from worldly desires and therefore were liberated while living in this world (*Jiwan Mukta*). Now you are ready to merge into the Supreme Soul (Akaal Purakh); so meditate on Him. I am standing by your bedside and praying for your eternal peace". Mata Dhan Kaur followed the advice of her son, closed her eyes and in a very short time breathed her last.

The next day the body of Mata Dhan Kaur was cremated according to the Sikh rites. Following this, all relatives and acquaintances gathered as congregation in the local Gurdwara where after the Keertan (devotional hymn singing) Baba Bir Singh gave a discourse on the phenomenon of death and what Guru Granth Sahib teaches how a Sikh should react if a death occurs to a near and dear one. He quoted from Guru Granth Sahib several hymns to substantiate his own thoughts on the subject. After that a supplication was offered to Akaal Purakh for the emancipation of *Mata Ji's* soul and grant of capacity and ability to her family members to live in His will.

After discharging all the religious duties of a son following the death of his mother, Baba Bir Singh started devoting his time to the missionary work in the Majha and Doaba areas of Punjab. In a relatively short time he covered a large number of villages and towns where he spread the message of the Gurus. His fame preceded him wherever he went and people were eager to listen to his forceful sermons. Even today, there are over 350 towns in these areas where the missionary work of Baba Bir Singh is commemorated annually. Large congregational gatherings are held where Akhand Paaths (non-stop reading of Guru Granth Sahib), Keertan and Gurbani discourses are recited. The most famous of these meetings is held in the month of May in Damdama Sahib Thaat.

Once a Muslim clergy (a *Mullaah*) came to Baba Bir Singh and asked him, "you people believe in One God and at the same time you also believe that He is present in everyone. If that is so, then if one person falls ill, every body should also fall sick and if one dies then all should pass away. We, on the contrary, believe that God resides in the seventh heaven. He has created all beings and they are all different from each other as He willed. Some are happy while others suffer. Only on doom's day all the souls will gather and each will be rewarded (to heaven) or punished (to hell) according to their deeds".

Baba Bir Singh replied, "If God resides in the seventh heaven then how could he provide for billions of His creatures? If He is confined to what you call the seventh heaven, how can He have the knowledge of innumerable worlds? We know that he takes care of all His creatures, wherever they are and provides for them day after day. Even He is addressed in Holy Quran as "Rabbulalameen" which means He is creator of all the worlds. Furthermore, God who has no form, colour or feature, how could He be confined to a particular place? As far as heaven and hell are concerned, they are creations of imagination of human beings. When God first created human beings, no one was there to commit good or bad deeds. Why would He then make heaven and hell? God is present in every particle that He has created, whether it is animate or inanimate". The *Mullaah* had no response for Baba Ji.

According to Gurmat (Sikh philosophy), a true Sant is like a sandalwood tree which imparts permanent fragrance to all the trees that are close to it. Similarly, anyone who stays close to a Sant and does selfless service with humility, himself becomes a Sant. This analogy perfectly describes how Baba Khuda Singh, who served Baba Bir Singh with extreme devotion, became a Sant of great repute. The fantastic story of Baba Khuda Singh begins with the missionary visit of Baba Bir Singh to Karnal and adjoining towns and villages (now in Haryana state). At that time, one Jaswant Singh was a police inspector in that area. He was an honest officer and a devout Gursikh. He daily recited Gurbani from Guru Granth Sahib in his melodious voice in the Gurdwara of village Kurhahi where he was in charge of the police post. One morning Baba Bir Singh went to this Gurdwara when Jaswant Singh was reading from Guru Granth Sahib. He sat down to listen to this melodiously recited Gurbani. Soon he went into deep state of meditation. On concluding his recitation, Jaswant Singh came to Baba Bir Singh and respectfully bowed before him. Baba Bir Singh opened his eyes and said, "I have come here to take you with me". On hearing these words Jaswant Singh felt as if he had known Baba Ji for many years, or even from his previous birth. They then started talking and soon found that they agreed on almost all aspects of Sikhism. Jaswant Singh then humbly requested Baba Ji to visit his home and accept his humble offering of food. To this, Baba Bir Singh agreed. Bhai Natha Singh, the father of Jaswant Singh said, "We are fortunate to have an opportunity to serve a pious soul like Sant Baba Bir Singh". Baba Ji replied, "You are extremely fortunate to have an equally pious soul (Jaswant Singh) in your family".

The whole congregation of the village Kurhahi, under the leadership of Jaswant Singh requested Baba Bir Singh to stay in their village for some more time and preach. To this Baba Ji agreed and spent about two months there. Thousands of devotees attended his sermons and got immense benefit by the Gurbani discourses. As time passed, Jaswant Singh's thinking gradually changed. His attraction towards worldly affairs waned and his desire to pursue a spiritual path increased. He developed a great attraction for the Gurbani discourses by Baba Bir Singh and his keen desire to always stay with Baba Ji, took hold of his mind.

When Baba Bir Singh was ready to leave, Jaswant Singh humbly requested him to come back soon. To this sincere request, Baba Ji agreed and visited the Kurhahi village after about six months. This time Jaswant Singh opened his mind to Baba Ji and asked for his advice so he could pursue a path to achieve the real purpose of life. Baba Bir Singh replied, "Both of us have been given the human form by Akaal Purakh for the same purpose, to devote our lives towards the service of humanity and to spread the message of our great Gurus. Time has come for you to embark upon the path for which the Creator (Akaal Purakh) has sent you here".

After spending a few more days there, Baba Bir Singh left for Naurangabad. However, before leaving, he said to Jaswant Singh, "Destiny has brought us together for a reason. Akaal Purakh has some task for us to carry out. When the time comes, I will call you; and if you forget these words of mine then I will drag you by your head".

After Baba Bir Singh's departure Bhai Jaswant Singh became busy in his work. For some time he was waiting for Baba Ji's call but as the time passed he forgot the words of Baba Ji. Then one day, for no apparent reason, he started having a *migraine* headache. The doctors tried all available medications for this ailment, but it only got worse. His wife reminded him of Baba Bir Singh's words ("I will drag you by your head") and said that probably Baba Ji was remembering him. Bhai Jaswant Singh immediately resigned from his job, took his wife and his five year old son and started for Una where Baba Bir Singh was staying those days. The headache subsided as suddenly as it had appeared.

Reaching Una, Bhai Jaswant Singh found that Baba Bir Singh had left for Naurangabad. He, however, decided to stay there for some time, in the service of Baba Sahib Singh Bedi. With great devotion and humility. He along with his wife, started carrying out what tasks were allotted to them at the Dera and spent all spare time in recitation of Gurbani and meditation on Naam. One day, Baba Sahib Singh called Jaswant Singh and said, "I am very pleased with your selfless service and humble personality and pray to Guru Nanak to grant success in your mission. Now you should go to Baba Bir Singh in Naurangabad. He will further instruct you on your life's mission".

Bhai Jaswant Singh left Una and reached Naurangabad. After meeting with Baba Bir Singh, he was given the duty of personal attendant to Baba Ji. He carried out his duties with great diligence and humility and in his spare time he practiced meditation. Baba Bir Singh was very pleased with his service and taught him Bhakti Yoga, whereby he learned techniques to control his faculties and focus on the formless (Akaal Purakh). Practice of this yoga leads one to attainment of bliss with the Supreme Being. Bhai Jaswant Singh started practising according to Baba Ji's guidance and soon achieved a very high spiritual state of bliss. He then left on an international tour to preach the word of Gurus. After travelling through most of the Western Punjab he went to Peshawar. After spending some time in Peshawar he went to Afghanistan. He is known to have worked many miracles and he became known as Baba Khuda Singh.

In spite of having gained all the fame and the spiritual powers Baba Bir Singh was an extremely humble person. He believed in the teaching of Guru Nanak:

ਨੀਚਾ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਨੀਚ ਜਾਤਿ ਨੀਚੀ ਹੂ ਅਤਿ ਨੀਚੁ॥
ਨਾਨਕੁ ਤਿਨ ਕੈ ਸੰਗਿ ਸਾਥਿ ਵਡਿਆ ਸਿਉ ਕਿਆ ਰੀਸ॥
ਜਿਥੈ ਨੀਚ ਸਮਾਲੀਅਨਿ ਤਿਥੈ ਨਦਰਿ ਤੇਰੀ ਬਖਸੀਸ॥ (SGGS, P.15)
The lowest among low caste; and the lowest ones, Nanak is by their side; he does not envy with the great ones in the world. Lord! Your grace showers where the poor are cherished.

Also he had an intense devotion for Baba Bhag Singh. Once he went to Baba Bhag Singh Ji at Kurri and stayed there for some time, in service of pilgrims who were visiting the Dera. When he was ready to leave, Baba Bhag Singh gave him a beautiful horse and a basket full of pomegranates from Kandhaar, to be delivered to Baba Sahib Singh Bedi at Una. Such was the devotion of Baba Bir Singh to both Baba Bhag Singh as well as Baba Sahib Singh that he travelled from Kurri to Una, a distance of several hundred miles, on foot, not riding the horse that was to be the ride for Baba Sahib Singh. Furthermore, he carried the basket of pomegranates on his head in order to save them from getting damaged. On reaching Una, he delivered Baba Bhag Singh's gifts to Baba Sahib Singh, who was immensely pleased. When he came to know the way Baba Bir Singh had brought these gifts, he was overwhelmed at his humility and showered him with blessings. After staying there for a few days, Baba Bir Singh left Una and came to Naurangabad and made this town his permanent abode.

His Gurbani discourses touched the hearts of the listeners and attracted a large number of devotees every day. Soon his fame spread all over Punjab. As a result hundreds of pilgrims started visiting his Dera. On some special days (like Gurpurabs) this number reached several thousands. The common kitchen (langar) at Naurangabad was always so extensive that thousands of devotees could easily be fed daily. The two sevadars (those carrying the duty in the Langar), Bhai Bulaka Singh and Bhai Gulab Singh, were so mindful of their duties that daily, after all the pilgrims had been fed, they even fed any stray dogs roaming around the Dera before they themselves took food.

Once a devotee brought a can full of Ghee (clarified melted butter) to be used in the Langar. One of the cooks, instead of using it in the langar, hid it and started consuming it himself. After sometime, this cook developed pustules all over his body. When Baba Bir Singh came to know of this malady of the cook, he called him and said, "You must have stolen something from the Langar and used it for your own purpose". The cook readily admitted that he had stolen the can of Ghee and had been using it to prepare his own food. Baba Ji admonished him, saying that in Guru's house, greed of any kind was a taboo, because it led to disastrous results for the body as well as the mind. The cook apologized for his misdeed and pledged to work honestly in future.

Although a spiritual man, Baba Bir Singh was also a great patriot and had deep feelings for the Khalsa Raj. He therefore kept himself aware of the political games going on in Lahore. It hurt him greatly to see the ominous signs of hatred between Dogra brothers and some Sardars even while Maharaja Ranjit Singh was still alive. He held Dhian Singh Dogra responsible for the death of Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa. In his discourses therefore, he explained the events of the time to his devotees to raise their awareness of what was happening at Lahore Darbar and its repercussions on the country. A true patriot, Baba Bir Singh, brought together Baba Maharaj Singh, Baba Khuda Singh, Sardar Sham Singh and Sardar Sher Singh who expended all their efforts to save the Khalsa Empire from disaster after the death of Maharajah Ranjit Singh in 1839. (Ranjeet Singh, with his bravery, farsightedness and statesman-ship, had created a vast empire, which he ruled for forty years. He had one of the finest armies of the time and the country was prosperous and peaceful. Not a single person was given a death sentence during his reign. But within a few years after his death, Sandhawalia Sardars and Dogra brothers, in order to grab power, started conspiring against each other. It was their internecine fighting that gave the cunning British a chance to annex the Khalsa Raj).

Baba Bir Singh, on seeing the situation, began warning the masses of the mischievous activities of the Dogra brothers. Raja Hira Singh Dogra was enraged at Baba Ji's activities and decided to have him assassinated while he was on a missionary tour of Majha area. However, he did not succeed in his nefarious plans.

One day, while Baba Ji was staying in the village Nagoke, he asked Bhai Makhan Singh Pujari to go to Khadoor, where Baba Khuda Singh was staying at that time, and request him on behalf of Baba Bir Singh, to come to Nagoke. He further added that Baba Khuda Singh be brought with great respect - riding an elephant. Bhai Makhan Singh took an elephant along with him and went to Khadoor. When he delivered the message of Baba Bir Singh, Baba Khuda Singh very humbly said, "It is not proper to go to one's mentor riding an elephant. Also, at this time, I do not feel like going to Nagoke. Please convey my humble response to Baba Ji". When Bhai Makhan Singh returned to Nagoke, Baba Ji was sitting in the evening congregational meeting. Bhai Makhan Singh delivered Baba Khuda Singh's message. On hearing the reply Baba Bir Singh said, "Now I will call him myself". He then asked the congregation to continue the Keertan all night.

He sat in the congregation till midnight. After that he went and took rest for a couple of hours. Early in the morning, after taking his bath, he sat down in meditation and telepathically sent his message to Baba Khuda Singh to come and visit him as soon as possible. Baba Khuda Singh, at that time, was also sitting in meditation. He suddenly opened his eyes and told his personal attendant (devotee) that they must leave for Nagoke village immediately.

When Baba Khuda Singh reached Nagoke Baba Bir Singh was sitting in the morning congregational gathering. Baba Khuda Singh bowed first before Guru Granth Sahib and then before Baba Bir Singh and said, "As you ordered, your servant has come". Baba Bir Singh said to him, "What was the reason for your inability to come when I had sent my messenger"? Baba Khuda Singh replied, "It is my perception that within a few days an awfully shocking catastrophe is going to occur - your body is going to be riddled with bullets. I felt that it was beyond my capacity and ability to witness such a scene. That is why I was reluctant to come here. However, when I received your direct command, being your humble servant, it was my duty to obey". On hearing these prophetic words of Baba Khuda Singh, Baba Bir Singh Ji said, "The conditions at the Lahore Darbar do indicate that I will be martyred soon, as you have predicted. However, all this is happening according to the will of Akaal Purakh and we must stay happy and contented in His will".

Foreseeing that his end was not too far, he appointed one of his foremost disciples, Baba Maharaj Singh, in charge of the affairs of the Dera (Baba Khuda Singh declined by saying that he intended to go abroad on missionary work). Baba Bir Singh then continued on his tour of the Majha area villages preaching the teachings of Sikhism.

Even while on missionary tour, Baba Bir Singh kept himself informed of the events at Lahore Darbar and continued making the masses aware of the dirty tricks of the Dogra brothers. He was disappointed to see the internecine conflicts and conspiracies with which the Darbar was infested soon after the death of Maharajah Ranjit Singh. He knew that the Khalsa empire was not going to last very long under those circumstances. He also knew that anarchy like that usually resulted in bloodshed of thousands of innocent people. He therefore tried all he could to somehow get the situation under control, but found himself helpless. Even Akaal Purakh seemed inclined to let the total disaster of the Maharaja's family happen.

Baba Bir Singh witnessed these events as they unfolded. The first victim of this wrath of destiny was Maharajah Kharak Singh, the eldest son of Maharajah Ranjit Singh. The next victim was his grandson, Kanwar Naunihal Singh, who was the brightest member of Maharajah Ranjit Singh's family and who hated English people for their unethical scheming. He was first injured, in a conspiracy cooked up by Dogra brothers and then hacked to death while lying in his bed. In retaliation the Sandhawalia Sardars, Attar Singh and Ajit Singh killed Dhyan Singh Dogra, Maharajah Sher Singh and his son Partap Singh. Daleep Singh, the youngest son of Maharajah Ranjit Singh was then enthroned with his mother, Maharani Jindan, as the queen mother and caretaker of the empire. After the death of Dhyan Singh Dogra, his son Hira Singh was appointed as the prime minister. His first act was to avenge the murder of his father and Maharajah Sher Singh. Ajit Singh and his loyal troops were liquidated, but Attar Singh escaped and took refuge at the Dera of Baba Bir Singh in Naurangabad. Because of non-availability of living quarters, Attar Singh's family had to stay in the stable of Baba Bir Singh. Thus the prophesy of Baba Ji came to fulfilment.

Baba Bir Singh tried to bring about a settlement between Attar Singh Sandhawalia and the Khalsa army, sent to Naurangabad under the control of Hira Singh Dogra. His efforts, however, did not succeed. Hira Singh demanded an unconditional surrender of Attar Singh, but Baba Bir Singh did not agree to it because he knew the evil intentions of Hira Singh.

Baba Bir Singh now realized that the assault by the Khalsa army on his Dera was inevitable. He told all his devotees to stay calm, recite Gurbani and not take up arms under any circumstances. He told Baba Maharaj Singh, then in charge of Langar, to prepare a large quantity of food and Karhah Prashad because the invading soldiers would be hungry. He reminded him that the tradition of the Dera was that no one who came there went without having food, not even an enemy.

As predicted by Baba Bir Singh, the Khalsa army assaulted by firing cannons. Baba Bir Singh sat calmly in the congregation, meditating on Akaal Purakh. Soon there was death all over the congregation. Baba Ji's body was riddled with bullets as predicted by Baba Khuda Singh. Attar Singh Sandhawalia was also killed. Thus came the tragic end to an immaculate soul who had spent all his life spreading the message of the Gurus and thus had brought thousands into the fold of Sikhism. According to his instructions, the body of Baba Bir Singh was not cremated; but immersed in the river.

As a result of his martyrdom, the Lahore Darbar lost all sympathy of the masses. Even the Khalsa army realized the sin they had committed. In utter frustration and anger, they pounced on Hira Singh Dogra and his Dogra army and put them all to sword.

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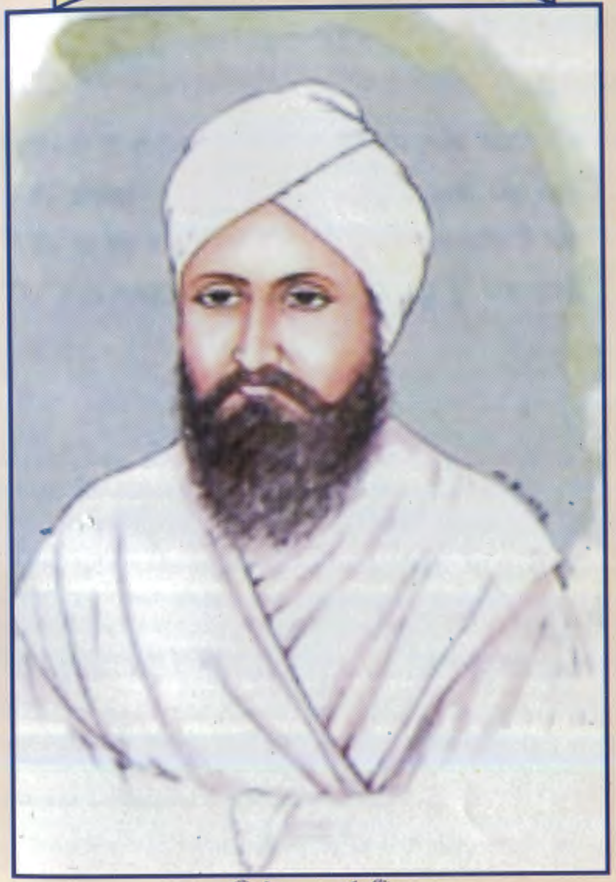
Baba Karam Singh Ji of Hoti Mardaan



BABA KARAM SINGH JI OF HOTI-MARDAAN

Baba Sahib Singh Bedi of Una, who was the eighth generation descendent of Guru Nanak Dev, was a very pious person. He had achieved a very high spiritual status because of his self-less devotion to Akaal Purakh and Guru Granth Sahib and was therefore highly revered by a very large number of Sikhs. So much so that he was requested to apply the sacred mark of royalty on the forehead of Maharajah Ranjit Singh at the ceremony of the latter's coronation. He often travelled all over Punjab in order to preach the tenets of Sikhism and give spiritual counsel to his devotees. In this connection he once visited the district of Rawalpindi (now in Pakistan) and stayed in the village 'Kallar'. The devoted family of Bibi Kartar Kaur in this village hosted Baba Ji and his entourage (he always travelled with a fairly large number of companions which included Ragis, cooks, accountant and personal attendants) and with great humility and devotion took care of their boarding and lodging. Bibi Subi Kaur, the younger sister of Bibi Kartar Kaur, who lived in a nearby village, was visiting her sister at that time. She exhibited exemplary devotion in preparing and serving of food to the Sangat and looking after the comfort of Baba Sahib Singh, who was immensely pleased with the devotion and selfless service of Bibi Kartar Kaur's family.

When Baba Ji was departing from the village, he called the two sisters and gave them his blessings for their untiring service. At that time Bibi Kartar Kaur, with folded hands requested Baba Ji to pray to Akaal Purakh to bestow the gift of a baby boy on her younger sister, Subi Kaur, who was married for several years but was still issueless. Baba Sahib Singh closed his eyes, said a supplication to Guru Nanak and then opened his eyes and said, "Guru Nanak is pleased with the devotion of your sister. Soon she would be blessed with a son who would be an exemplary Gursikh and a spiritually accomplished person".

A few years later, this boon of Baba Sahib Singh came to fulfilment. In June of 1826, a baby boy was born to Bibi Subi Kaur. In addition to the usual rejoicing with feasts and singing of traditional songs, Kirpa Singh, the father of the baby who was a devout Sikh, had an Akhand Paath (non-

stop recitation of complete Guru Granth Sahib) completed at his house as a token of gratitude to Akaal Purakh. At the conclusion of this religious ceremony following the Sikh tradition, Karam Singh was the name given to the baby.

Karam Singh was a healthy baby who grew up to be a very handsome youth with a slightly heavyset body. From the very childhood, he was a sweet-natured and obedient boy who seemed to have a great desire to learn. Bibi Subi Kaur was delighted to see this aptitude of her son and taught him the basic tenets of Sikhism with love and enthusiasm, which Karam Singh learned very quickly. Consequently, he always spoke truth, stayed away from deception and made honesty an integral part of his daily life. He spoke only when it was necessary and therefore, had little interest to spend much time gossiping with his playmates. He preferred to sit alone and contemplate.

At a relatively young age his father sent him to the local Gurdwara to learn Gurmukhi and Gurbani, as was the custom those days. In a short time, Karam Singh became proficient in reading and writing of Gurmukhi and learned by heart many Sikh prayers (Japu Ji, Rehras etc.) and other Gurbani passages. He was then sent to the local school to learn Persian, the then court language.

Karam Singh's family had a great faith and devotion to the Dera of Baba Bir Singh Ji at Naurangabad[1] and visited there to pay homage whenever it was possible. On one such visit, young Karam Singh also accompanied his parents. As good luck would have it, he met Baba Ram Singh, who was one of the senior disciples of Baba Bir Singh Ji and at that time the incharge of the Dera. Baba Ram Singh showed an unusual interest in the young boy. He explained the significance of Naam Simran and Seva, the two pillars of Sikhi, to young Karam Singh in such a beautiful way that he (Karam Singh) got convinced that it was the way to lead his life. He took Amrit (Khande-di-Pauhul) from Baba Ram Singh and took a vow to lead his life according to the Sikh teachings.

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[1] Baba Bir Singh, the saint-soldier, had established a Dera at Naurangabad with the blessing of Baba Sahib Singh Bedi. Because of the great spiritual personality of Baba Bir Singh and his association with Baba Sahib Singh, who was a descendent of Guru Nanak Dev, this Dera became famous all over Punjab for Sikh missionary work and selfless service to needy irrespective of their caste or creed. After Baba Bir Singh's martyrdom, Baba Maharaj Singh became incharge of the Dera. His piety combined with his patriotism made the Dera even more famous. Baba Maharaj Singh was captured by the British government on a charge of insurrection and exiled to Singapur where, because of maltreatment by the government, he passed away. The responsibility of managing of Naurangabad Dera then came to Baba Ram Singh who was the senior most disciple of Baba Maharaj Singh and an equally pious and devout Sikh.

When Bhai Karam Singh became 18 years of age he expressed desire to serve in the Khalsa army. To this the parents gladly gave their permission. The recruiting officer was impressed with this healthy and strong youngman, and immediately accepted him. Within a few years, however, the Khalsa Raj was annexed into the British Empire, the army was disbanded, and Bhai Karam Singh returned home.

The British were highly impressed by the bravery with which the Sikhs fought the wars against them and did not want to completely lose the Khalsa army. They were also in need of a large number of soldiers to protect the expanded borders of their Empire, which now touched Afghanistan. The British Government therefore decided to establish a cantonment at Mardaan. For this purpose, old soldiers of the Khalsa army were invited to get enlisted. Bhai Karam Singh and many of his companions in the old regiment decided to join the British Army and Karam Singh was enlisted in the 'guides platoon' and sent to Mardaan[2].

The British Government wanted the brave Khalsa to stay loyal to them. They had also noticed that because of the recent defeats in the Anglo-Sikh wars many Sikhs were demoralized and were in danger of getting absorbed into Hinduism unless the teachings of Guru Gobind Singh, which were responsible for the martial spirit and immaculate conduct of the Khalsa, were revived. Therefore, the government made it mandatory that all enlisted Sikhs in the British Army must take the "Khande-di-Pauhul" and follow the teachings of Guru Gobind Singh. Since Bhai Karam Singh was already leading his life strictly according to the Sikh tenets and was an ideal member of the Khalsa Brotherhood, all his fellow soldiers respected him. The English officers soon realized this and also started giving him due regard. He was soon promoted to the rank of a corporal.

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[2] A small town in the north-west of Pakistan.

Once a man named Lal Singh came to get enlisted in the army. Although he fulfilled all other prerequisites for the enlistment, his identification could not be verified. He was therefore rejected. In great disappointment, he was returning when Bhai Karam Singh happened to meet him. His looks indicated as if he had met with a catastrophe in life. With great sympathy, Bhai Karam Singh asked him the reason for his disappointment. Lal Singh told him the reason for his getting rejected from recruitment in the army. Although this was the first time Bhai Karam Singh had met Lal Singh, he took him back to the cantonment and on his recommendation, Lal Singh was accepted and was included in the same platoon as that of Bhai Karam Singh. Lal Singh was so grateful that he decided to stay with Bhai Karam Singh till the end of his life. The more he came to know of the pious and immaculate character of Bhai Karam Singh, the greater devotion he developed for him.

By 1850, after the capture of the Khalsa Raj, the British rule extended throughout India. In order to consolidate their hold on the country the British Government took control of many states whose rulers had indicated even a slight sign of disloyalty to the English throne. Thus there were many dethroned Rajas and Nawabs who were looking for an opportunity to avenge their insult. In 1857 this disenchantment erupted in the form of the socalled mutiny[3] in which Bahadur Shah, the Mughal king of Delhi, the Rani of Jhansi, the Nawab of Oudh and the Maratha chief, Nana Sahib (who detested the arrogance of English people and wanted to get rid of them) were actively involved. In Punjab, however, the situation was quite different. The British, immediately after annexation of Punjab, had wooed the Khalsa by enlisting a large number of Sikhs in the army and made it mandatory for every enlisted Sikh to follow the Sikh tenets. These actions kept the Sikhs loyal to the British government. In Meerut and Delhi, however, a large number of English women and children were massacred by the mutineers and the British Government was determined to suppress this uprising ruthlessly.

The regiment, to which Bhai Karam Singh belonged, was despatched to Delhi with the order to show no mercy to the mutineers. Soon the mutineers were thoroughly defeated and the British commander issued the order to the soldiers to celebrate the victory by doing whatever they pleased in the city. In no time, the soldiers fell upon the city to plunder. Bhai Karam Singh had absolutely no intention to join this pillage. But in order to see this historic city, he went for a walk. As he was walking in what was an affluent part of the city, he heard a female voice calling him. He walked towards the half-opened door where a Muslim woman was standing. She said, "I have heard that Sikhs are honest and unblemished people and you look like a Sikh. I have therefore called you at the risk of my life and request you in the name of your preceptor to protect the honour of my daughters". Karam Singh assured her that he would do his best to save her family from any harm by the miscreant soldiers. He then stood at the door of the house like a sentinel until the time allowed by the commander was over. He then knocked at the door and when the woman opened it, he told her that she and her family were now safe. The woman thanked him and requested him to come inside the house for a few moments. When Bhai Karam Singh went inside, she brought a plate full of gold coins and jewels and presented it to him. Bhai Karam Singh refused to accept any presents and asked her to pray for him to stay steadfast in his life of honesty, integrity and devotion to his faith. The woman started crying and gave her heart-felt blessings to Bhai Karam Singh.

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[3] Also known as the first war of independence.

All soldiers were now given time off to visit their families. Bhai Karam Singh also went home to meet his parents. On reaching home his mother asked if he had brought gold and jewellery, from the plunder of Delhi, as other soldiers from the village had done. Bhai Karam Singh replied, "I am a Sikh of Guru Gobind Singh and according to his teachings every penny obtained by dishonest means is like poison. I do not want to feed poison to my own family". The mother was upset with this reply and kept quiet but Bhai Karam Singh felt that the family was not very happy with him. After a few days he left his house and went back to his unit at Mardaan.

Bhai Karam Singh was convinced that as a true believer in the teachings of the Gurus he was supposed to live his life according to the Sikh tenets to the best of his capacity and ability and this included the discharge his duty in the army. This he did carry out with great honesty and integrity. Whatever time he found outside of his duty hours he spent in meditation on Naam and seldom indulged himself in useless gossip in

the company of other soldiers.

There was a small river near the cantonment. He would daily get up early in the morning, go to this river, take a bath and then with the single-minded concentration recite the prayer of Sukhmani Sahib. Sometimes he was so much absorbed in the prayer that he forgot the passage of time and got late to present himself for his duty. The officers were so much impressed by his honesty and immaculate conduct that they usually overlooked these minor lapses. Even the commander of the regiment had a great regard for him.

One day a newly enlisted soldier saw Bhai Karam Singh sitting by the side of the river in deep meditation. He knew that it was the time for Bhai Karam Singh to be on his guard duty. In order to get into good books of the platoon officer he went and told that Karam Singh was still sitting on the bank of the river when he was supposed to be on duty. The officer immediately went to where Bhai Karam Singh was supposed to be on duty and found that he was standing, quite alert as usual, on duty. The complainant was amazed at this physically impossible feat and apologised from the officer for bothering him.

Gradually, Bhai Karam Singh kept on advancing in spiritual stages. He realized that he had now occult powers at his command and that he could foresee the events of the future and read what was in somebody's mind. However, he was fully aware of the injunction of the Gurus that by acquiring such supernatural powers one should not become proud but stay humble and try to hide such capabilities. He therefore, neither divulged this secret to anyone nor gave up the usual humility that was his trademark.

Once a high-ranking army officer was to visit the Mardaan cantonment for inspection. To welcome him, the cantonment commander made arrangements for a special parade and issued an order that all the officers and soldiers must be in their best form for this particular occasion.

On the day of the visit of the officer Bhai Karam Singh got up early in the morning and according to his daily routine went to the river for a bath. After taking the bath, he sat down in deep meditation. He got absorbed in meditation so much that he did not open his eyes until the specified time of the parade had long passed. Bhai Karam Singh realized that he had missed the parade and would probably be severely punished for desertion of duty - may even be courtmartialled.

In the cantonment, on the other side, at the specified time of parade all the officers and soldiers assembled and fell in for the parade in their neatly pressed uniforms and spit-polished shoes. Among all these soldiers Bhai Karam Singh was also present and the visiting officer particularly noticed this smart young soldier whose uniform was the cleanest, belt buckle was the shiniest of all and whose mannerism in the parade was superior to all his companions. The officer was quite pleased with the over all performance of the cantonment officers and soldiers but was particularly impressed with Bhai Karam Singh. On leaving, he strongly recommended to the cantonment commander that Bhai Karam Singh be promoted immediately. This news spread like wild fire among all the soldiers.

Bhai Karam Singh, after returning from the river went directly to his quarters and quietly sat down there. Some of his companions living in the same barrack soon returned from the parade and congratulated him on his promotion. Bhai Karam Singh thought that they were joking because he was probably going to be demoted. But, when he found out that they were speaking the truth and that he was actually being promoted for his outstanding appearance in the parade, he thought to himself, "He, in whose love I had been sitting on the river-bank oblivious of the world, himself came and appeared in my place in the parade". With this realization he got totally imbued in Guru's love and there and then decided that he would not work for even one more day for any man but the Guru only.

The next morning Bhai Karam Singh went to the cantonment commander's office and submitted his resignation. The colonel had heard about the exalted spiritual state of Bhai Karam Singh and had even heard the rumours that the previous day he was sitting in meditation on the river bank while the parade was going on in the cantonment. However, his materialistic mind was not ready to accept such an incredible story. But, he also did not want to lose a soldier as promising as Bhai Karam Singh. Therefore, he refused to accept the resignation. Bhai Karam Singh was in a state of extreme love with the Guru. He told the colonel that he was no longer a servant to any human agency because he had dedicated his life to Akaal Purakh (God). The colonel insisted that since he had joined the army on his own accord, he was the servant of the British Government until he was relieved of his duty by his officer-incharge. Bhai Karam Singh replied that since the highest authority, the Supreme Commander (God), had struck his name off from the register of the British Army and had accepted him (Karam Singh) in His own service, the British Government had no claim on him any more. The colonel was flabbergasted to hear such an answer from a mere soldier. However, he took the register that contained the names of all the soldiers who were in his regiment. He was amazed when he could not find the name of Bhai Karam Singh anywhere in that register. He was now convinced of the spiritual power of Bhai Karam; therefore, he accepted his resignation. At the same time he requested (and so did all his companions) that he should stay not too far from the cantonment so that they could get an opportunity to see and serve him. To this Bhai Karam Singh agreed.

Now that he was free from all worldly encumbrances, Bhai Karam Singh decided to devote all his time to meditation on and contemplation of Akaal Purakh. He found a cave not too far from the cantonment , by the side of the river Kalpani and made it his abode and place of meditation. Within a short time he reached a realm of spirituality where he could perceive the presence of Akaal Purakh within as well as without. He had achieved control over occult powers and could play miracles at will but like a true Sikh he stayed humble. He neither exercised not publicised his capabilities and led a simple and unassuming life.

It is said that when rose blossoms, its fragrance cannot be contained. Similarly the episode of the parade and the vanishing of his name from the recruitment register, together with the news of his dedicating his life to meditation slowly spread in the adjoining areas. As a result, many people started coming to have his *'darshan'* (vision) to his newly occupied cave and the number of such devotees kept on increasing day by day.

Baba Karam Singh spoke very little to the visiting devotees and did not accept any offerings. If someone left any offerings, and many people did so, he would not even look at them and let someone else take them away. Occasionally he spoke a few words and they invariably were urging the visitors to follow the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib. Sometimes he inadvertently said something to someone, which came to be true. Several such stories started circulating and his fame gradually spread even in far off areas of Punjab. Consequently large number of devotees started coming some of whom could not return the same day because they had come from distant towns. But there was no facility for anyone to stay there overnight nor was any arrangement of kitchen to cook food for these pilgrims.

It has already been mentioned that Bhai Lal Singh, who was accepted in the army on the personal recommendation of Baba Karam Singh, had vowed to stay all his life with Baba Ji. Therefore, when Baba Karam Singh left the army Bhai Lal Singh also resigned and came to stay with him in order to serve him. In addition to looking after the comfort of Baba Karam Singh he also took upon himself to welcome the visiting devotees. One day he requested Baba Ji that some facility, howsoever meagre, was needed because among the visitors who came for his *'darshan'* there were many women and children also, who had to suffer great inconvenience of travelling, often in inclement weather, distances to go to nearby villages because of lack of any arrangement for boarding and lodging there. In the beginning Baba Ji ignored his request, but on his repeated reminders Baba Karam Singh agreed that one room may be constructed in order to store provisions, cook food and provide shelter to the pilgrims during inclement weather.

In a short time, a room was constructed. This happened in 1868, but soon thereafter because of the demand of ever increasing number of pilgrims, several rooms for overnight stay for families and a large room for Guru Granth Sahib and congregational gatherings were completed. This essentially, was the beginning of what ultimately became a large complex known as the 'Dera' of Baba Karam Singh.

In addition to the pilgrims from all over the province a number of soldiers from Baba Ji's regiment (guides platoon) had made it their daily routine to come and pay their homage at the Dera. Several English officers were so impressed with the piety and spirituality of Baba Ji that they also visited occasionally to pay their respect. Even whenever the army was going on any campaign, they first visited the Dera to receive the blessings of Baba Karam Singh.

For 25 years Baba Karam Singh stayed at the Dera. During this period his immaculate personality influenced innumerable Sikhs as well as non-Sikhs. They gave up vices like drinking and gambling and became regular visitors of local Gurdwaras and had Akhand Paaths (non-stop reading of complete Guru Granth Sahib) at their houses. Many times such devotees came and requested Baba Ji to come to their houses and grace the occasion of completion of Akhand Paath. Occasionally Baba Ji agreed and visited adjoining villages on such occasions. Otherwise, he spent his time in meditation at the Dera. Only once during these 25 years he took a trip to Amritsar for pilgrimage. On this visit he stopped over in several towns on the way and preached Guru Nanak's message to innumerable devotees.

With the increasing number of devotees coming to the Dera the work increased considerably; but Baba Ji never involved himself in any part of the management of the Dera. His only purpose in [illegible] was to meditate on Naam and preach the message of Gurus to all the visiting devotees. Bhai Lal Singh therefore took over the duty of managing the affairs of the Dera, which included looking after the comfort of the visitors, running the Langar (the community kitchen) and keeping accounts. All these duties he discharged with extreme honesty, ability and humility all his life.

LANGAR

The Langar at the Dera was kept open for all 24 hours of the day and the fare usually consisted of such items as are normally served in feasts on occasions like marriages. For example, sweet rice with curd was a regular item and occasionally rice pudding (*kheer*) was also served.

Once some Pathan burglars broke into the store of the Langar and took away most of the groceries. When the Sikhs expressed the idea of following them, Baba Ji said, "They must be hungry and in need of food. If they had come to the Langar, you would have had to prepare food and serve them (because there is no discrimination here). Now, they have spared you from the trouble of preparing food for them. They will prepare their own food. So there is no need to follow them".

DAILY ROUTINE OF BABA JI

Baba Karam Singh Ji spent most of his time in his cave, which was a couple of miles away from the complex of the Dera. His daily routine was as follows:

> After sleeping only for a couple of hours, he got up very early in the morning. He then went to the river and took a bath. After the bath he meditated either standing in neck-deep water or sitting on the river bank. At dawn, he returned to the cave and went into deep meditation there. After daybreak some devotees came and took him in a palanquin to the Dera where he again took a bath at the well with 101 buckets of water[4]. After this, he came to the congregation hall to listen to the Keertan. He spoke very little but blessed any devotee who came to him with humility and faith in the Gurus. He was famous to have great spiritual powers. Thousands of devotees with all kinds of worldly problems, who came to him, got benefited by his blessings. After spending a few hours in the congregation hall and meeting with the visiting devotees, he returned to his cave and spent the remaining time of the day in meditation and contemplation on Naam.
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> He took a light lunch at 12:00 noon and a light dinner late in the evening. He always took a small portion out of the food brought to him in a big plate and dishes, on his hands and returned the remaining back to the Langar where eager devotees shared small portions. He kept a cup and a small hand-hoe with him. The cup was to drink water and the hoe for digging ditches in the sand of the river, so that water seeped in them and small thirsty jungle animals could drink from them when the rest of the river (that was seasonal) dried up.

The Dera of Baba Karam Singh Ji was located in the heart of the Pathan country. The unusually rapid spread of fame of Baba Ji coupled with equally rapid expansion of the Dera compound made the (*mujawar*) incharge of the Khanqah of a Muslim Pir in the nearby town jealous. He incited the (mostly illiterate) Pathans of the area by saying that this

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[4] People had such deep devotion for Baba Ji that they took the water from his bath (the water that had touched his body) to their homes for consumption by their families.

infidel 'Pir' of Sikhs was spreading a faith antagonistic to the teachings of the holy Quran and was out to usurp their land. As a result some zealots openly started opposing the presence of the Dera and some even started conspiring to inflict bodily harm to Baba Karam Singh Ji. A few incidents that occurred as a result of the venom spread by the mujawar, are given below:

> The Pathans observed that most of the time Baba Ji was alone in his cave and at times, he came out and sat outside in meditation also. One day a Pathan went with a sword to where Baba Ji was sitting in meditation. He raised his arm with sword in hand to sever Baba Ji's head. But as he raised his arm it became totally numb and devoid of life. He started crying and fell at the feet of Baba Karam Singh Ji, who opened his eyes and touched the now lifeless arm of the miscreant. Immediately life started flowing in the arm. He ran away singing Baba Ji's praises. When he returned and narrated his story to his companions, they did not believe him but ridiculed him - calling him a coward and superstitious. Two of these companions returned after a few days to assassinate Baba Ji. But as they got close to where he was meditating they became blind. They then retreated. Hardly had they gone a few steps when they could see again. At first they thought that it was figment of their imagination; but on repeating their act a few times they were convinced that the result was always the same. Their minds got gripped with fear at such powers of Baba Ji and they beat their retreat.
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> Once, a group of four Pathans came to Baba Karam Singh Ji with the intention of assassinating him. As they got closer, they all felt as if Baba Ji was surrounded by Sikh bodyguards who on seeing them (Pathans) started advancing towards them to fight. They were so afraid of this vision that they took to their heels.
>
> Some clever Pathans argued that it would be much more profitable to abduct Baba Ji (instead of killing) because wherever they would take him, his devotees would follow with all the offerings, making them (the abductors) wealthy. It was, therefore decided to take Baba Ji outside the British territory into the town of Yadi in Wazirastan. A dozen or so Pathans got together and on a prearranged night started towards Baba Ji's cave. On the way, they

started arguing about the share of the expected offerings that each one of them would receive. This argument resulted in formation of groups who started fighting. Some of them were wounded in this skirmish and they returned empty handed.

Some more similar attempts were made on Baba Ji's life but each time, as if by the help of an unseen force, he remained unscathed. Gradually, even these savages (Pathans) started realizing that Baba Karam Singh Ji was a man of God and no mortal could harm him because the Almighty's graceful hand was protecting him. In spite of several attempts on his life by the Pathans, he never expressed anger on them. When some of them came and apologized, Baba Ji forgave them for their past misdeeds because he never thought of harming anyone. On the other hand, he gave them advice of always trying to help others.

YOUNG AYA SINGH

Once a group of devotees from Peshawar area came to the Dera. Among them was, a young boy named Aya Singh. The parents of this young boy had passed away some time back and the relatives who took the responsibility of bringing him up soon realized that the young boy had no interest in worldly pursuits. On the contrary, he liked to pass his time in the company of holy people. He also had a great desire to learn Gurbani and Sikh philosophy. They therefore had decided to bring him to the Dera of Baba Karam Singh Ji where he could fulfil his desire of spiritual pursuit.

On meeting Baba Ji the relative of young Aya Singh who had brought him there presented him and explained the purpose of bringing him to the Dera. He then humbly requested Baba Karam Singh Ji to accept the young boy as a disciple and "sevadar" at the Dera. Baba Ji smiled and asked the boy his name. In reply, the boy said, "I am Aya" (in Punjabi language it means, "sir I have come"). Baba Ji laughed and told the relative, "He says, I have come, so now you can go". Then he called his personal assistant, Bhai Lal Singh and told him to take care of the young boy and teach him meditation, selfless service and Gurbani.

From that day onward, Aya Singh dedicated his life in the service of Langar and spiritual pursuits by learning Gurbani and leading his life

according to the teachings of the Gurus. Finally, he reached the exalted position of becoming the spiritual heir to Baba Karam Singh Ji.

Baba Karam Singh Ji was an ideal Sikh. He had full control over the five human maladies, lust, anger, greed, worldly attachment and ego. Thousands of devotees daily visited the Dera to have his 'darshan' and get his blessings. They touched his feet and took great pride in rubbing on their foreheads, the dust under his feet. In spite of all this reverence, however, he always behaved as a humble servant of the Guru.

Once an English officer from the cantonment went on leave to visit his family in England but did not return to his duty after the period of his leave was over. The commanding officer tried to contact his family in England but came to know that he had never reached home. All efforts to locate him failed. His wife, who had stayed at Hoti while he had left for England, was afraid that some calamity had befallen him. She was extremely distraught and depressed and did not know what to do. A Sikh soldier who was the personal assistant (orderly) of the officer suggested her to go to Baba Karam Singh Ji who was a very kind-hearted, altruistic holy person; and possessed occult powers. The lady agreed and the soldier accompanied her to Baba Ji. On meeting with Baba Ji she related her pitiful story. Baba Ji listened to her; closed his eyes and kept quiet for some time. He then opened his eyes and said, "Do not worry dear lady, your husband will be back in a couple of weeks". Though it was hard for her to believe such a far fetched prediction, this is the first time in a long while that she had heard some words of sympathy and encouragement. Also Baba Ji's saintly appearance and sweet words gave her some mental satisfaction.

After a few days she received a letter from her husband in which he wrote that he had met with an accident and was unconscious for many days. No one could inform anyone regarding his whereabouts because he was not carrying any identification papers on him. The doctors had given him up as a hopeless case; but a few days back he had a dream in which a saintly person had placed his hand on his head and said, "You are not going to die". Soon after this dream, "I came out of my coma, which amazed even the doctors. Now I am recovering satisfactorily and will be discharged from the hospital in a few days". After a couple of weeks, he came back to the Hoti cantonment. The wife was overjoyed to see her husband whom she had almost given up as dead. At the same time she was grateful to Baba Karam Singh Ji. She believed that it was because of his blessing that her husband's life was saved.

She told her husband the story of her visit to the Dera and persuaded him to visit Baba Ji to express their gratitude. The husband reluctantly agreed and the two went to see Baba Karam Singh Ji. When they reached at the Dera, Baba Ji was meditating in the cave. After some time when he came out and the English officer saw him, he was completely flabbergasted. For some time he could not utter a single word. Finally he came to himself and bowed to touch Baba Ji's feet. Then he told his wife that the holy person who had appeared in his dream was no one else but Baba Karam Singh Ji. The couple then expressed their gratitude with tears in their eyes. Baba Ji said, "It is the tradition of Guru Nanak's house to help anyone who has any problem and who comes in humility and sincerity". Thereafter, the couple frequently visited the Dera and made donations for the Langar.

Within a short time the fame of Baba Karam Singh Ji spread far and wide. Large number of devotees started visiting the Dera and proportionately large sums of money started coming as offerings. But Baba Ji, a real renouncer, never took interest in the affairs of the Dera. He spent most of his time meditating and recitation of Gurbani in the small cave that was at a short distance from the Dera complex. The management of the Dera stayed in the able hands of Bhai Lal Singh.

Maharajah Partap Singh of Kashmir had no male issue and was worried that after his death his state would be annexed to the British Empire. He was also growing old and the hope of getting an heir to the throne was dwindling. To make the matters worse he developed a fistula, which in spite of all medical treatments would not cure. He heard about the miracles associated with the name of Baba Karam Singh Ji. In great desperation, he decided to see him as a last resort. His advisors told the Raja that his desire would be fulfilled only if he went to the Dera in humility and sincerity in heart. The Raja followed this advice and reached Hoti along with his entourage. On reaching at the Dera, he found that Baba ji was meditating in his cave. He patiently waited outside until Baba Ji finished his daily prayers. He then took permission from the personal sevadar (attendant) and entered the cave with folded hands.

He placed a large sum of money before Baba Ji and reverently bowed before him. On being asked the purpose of his visit, the Raja described his plight. Baba Ji told him that the money that he had offered was not needed; because the Guru's Langar was run by the donations of Guru's devotees and since he had brought the money in order to get his problems solved, it was not acceptable. So saying, he returned the money to the Raja. At the same time he said, "No one has ever gone disappointed from Guru Nanak's house. Since you have travelled a long distance to the Guru's house with specific desires in mind the Guru will fulfil your desires". The raja left the Dera with the firm belief that Baba Ji's words would become true. That is exactly what happened. In a short time, his fistula was cured and the next year a son was also born to his Rani. He became a devotee of Baba Ji and visited the Dera frequently.

Baba Karam Singh Ji's sight and words were known to have miraculous power of curing patients of chronic and uncurable diseases. Therefore, all kinds of patients whom the doctors had abandoned as hopeless cases used to come to him. Not only they got physically cured but also received the gift of Naam which gave them mental and spiritual awareness. Many came with the desire of a son or wealth and everyone went satisfied.

Baba Karam Singh Ji was taken from his cave to the Dera and back in a palanquin. One of the sevadars who had assumed the duty of carrying the palanquin was Ganda Mal. He was extremely poor and did not have any source of income. One day, in his generous mood, Baba Ji said to him, "Ganda Mal! Go to your village and open a shop, but do not forget to recite Sukhmani Sahib daily". Ganda Mal had such unshakeable faith in the words of Baba Ji that he immediately left for his village, somehow arranged for a small sum of money and opened a very small grocery shop. He ran his business honestly and daily recited Sukhmani Sahib before opening the shop. In a short time his business grew and he became comfortably wealthy.

One of Baba Ji's devotees named Nagina Singh, who was a very well to do man, once decided to have a congregational gathering at his house. He requested Baba Ji to come and grace the occasion, to which Baba Ji agreed. In his ego he got the idea in his head that at the function the langar should be so extensive and elaborate that for many years to come, people in the whole district would remember. He therefore made extensive arrangements for the preparation of many dishes by renowned cooks of the district specially brought from the city. It so happened that much larger than expected number of people came that day to have Darshan of Baba Ji. Nagina Singh realized that the Langar would not be enough for such a large number of attenders. He came to Baba Ji and humbly begged his pardon for the ego that he had harboured in his mind. Baba Ji told him that the Langar belonged to Guru Nanak and could never run short. He then asked Nagina Singh to show him the room where the prepared food (Langar) and the raw provisions were stored. On reaching the storeroom, he was told that all the bags of rice and wheat flour had been used up in the preparation of langar. Only a couple of bags of barley were left which were of no use for the preparation of Langar. Baba Ji said, "I think these bags are full of superior quality rice and not barley. Why not open and see how good they are?" When the bags were opened, Nagina Singh was surprised to see that they were full of Basmati rice". Many times when Baba Karam Singh visited some devotee's house for a congregational gathering the number of people that came to attend the function far exceeded the expectation of the host; but the Langar never ran short.

The soldiers belonging to Baba Karam Singh Ji's old regiment had great faith in him. Whenever they were going on a campaign, they first came to the Dera to get his blessings for the success of the mission. According to many soldiers whenever they were in a grave situation where their life was in peril, they remembered Baba Ji and inevitably, the situation eased. Many non-believers came to the Dera with the thought in mind that if Baba Ji addressed them by their name then they would become convinced of his spiritual powers. As it happened, Baba Ji always addressed the person by his name and talked to him for a few minutes as if he knew him for some time.

Once, an English officer sent one of his Sikh subordinate officers to Baba Ji with a proposal. Baba Ji did not agree to the proposal. At this, the egoist Sikh officer felt insulted and used some harsh and insulting words for Baba Ji. Baba Karam Singh Ji did not answer him and just kept quiet. After some time this Sikh officer got inflicted by a skin disease. His whole body became full of fistulas. The doctors tried all kinds of

medications but there was no relief. He was in great pain and felt that the reason for this malady was the defiled language that he had used for a truly saintly person. He went to a few close associates of Baba Ji and humbly requested them to intervene on his behalf. When his request was conveyed to Baba Ji, he smiled and said, "I have absolutely no grudge or rancour against him. I will pray for him to Guru Nanak to pardon his mistakes. Also tell him that he should supplicate to Guru Nanak and humbly request that he be forgiven". After a few days, his fistulas started subsiding and in time he got fully cured.

It is believed that those who have led their lives according to the tenets of their religion and have practiced meditation, usually perceive ahead of time their day of departure from this world. Baba Karam Singh Ji was one of such very few persons whose whole life was immaculately clean of any sins and on whom Akaal Purakh and Guru's grace showered because of his spotless character. He told about his merger into the Infinite, months ahead of the time. One day he announced in the congregation that he was going to leave this world soon. He then installed Baba Aya Singh in his place as the incharge of the Dera and said, "From today onward Baba Aya Singh possesses the same spiritual light as Guru Nanak has blessed me with. Do not think there is any difference between him and me". He then tied the turban of succession on Baba Aya Singh's head and gave him blessings.

Having finished the task of succession, he left the Dera in his palanquin. First he went to Mardaan and then to Akora village where he stayed for a short time. After this, he went to the town of Saida where he stayed for a few days at the house of Bibi Devaki, who was one of his foremost devotees. By this time, the news of Baba Ji's announcement regarding his oncoming merger in Akaal Purakh had spread all over Punjab. On hearing this, thousands of his devotees from all over the state started reaching Saida to have the Darshan (sight) of Baba Ji for the last time. On the twelfth day of his stay at Saida, at the end of the morning congregational meeting he bade his final farewell to all present in the congregation by saying the usual Khalsa greeting of, "Waheguru Ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji ki Fateh". He then went to his room and, lying down on the bed, covered himself with a sheet. He had left instructions that the door of his room should be opened after a certain time. When the door was opened, at the specified time and the sheet removed from his body, he was found to have passed away:

> ਸੂਰਜ ਕਿਰਣਿ ਮਿਲੇ ਜਲ ਕਾ ਜਲੁ ਹੂਆ ਰਾਮ ॥
> ਜੋਤੀ ਜੋਤਿ ਰਲੀ ਸੰਪੂਰਨੁ ਥੀਆ ਰਾਮ ॥ (SGGS, p. 846)
> *The ray is absorbed into the Sun, water into water is merged; perfection is attained.*

Before merging into Akaal Purakh, he had left instructions that his body was not to be cremated, but put in a box and dropped in the river Attok. Thousands of devotees were present when his body was disposed off according to his wishes into the river.

At the place in the town of Saida, where he had breathed his last, a splendid monument was erected in his memory. Every year thousands of devotees used to converge there to celebrate his anniversary. Now this town is a part of Pakistan.

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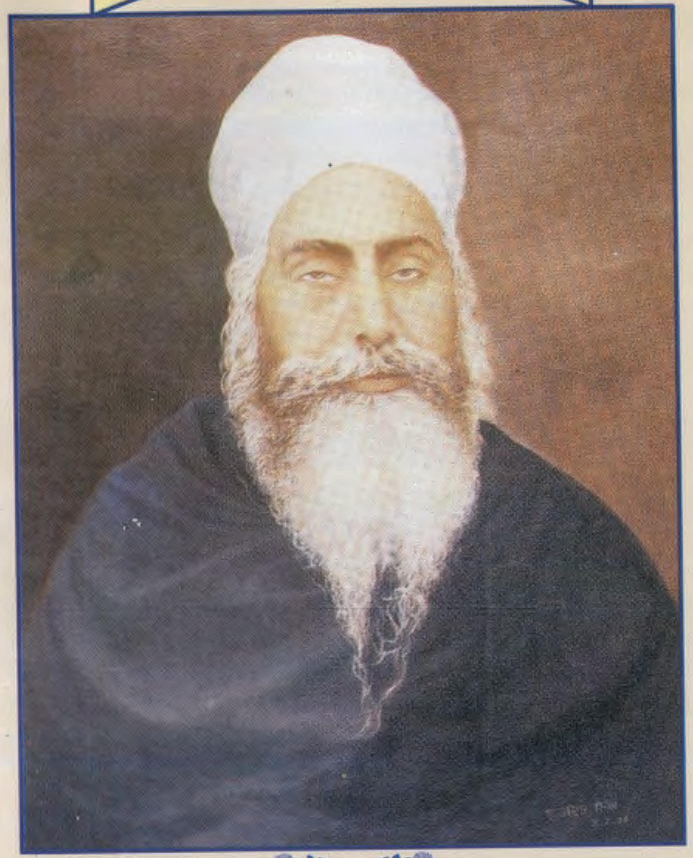
Sant Attar Singh Ji of Mastuana



SANT ATTAR SINGH JI OF MASTUANA

In the district of Patiala[1], in village Cheema, lived the highly devoted Gursikh family of Bhai Karam Singh. He was an even-tempered soul who followed the tenets of Sikhism with great care and respect. He spent a considerable portion of his time reciting Gurbani and meditating on Naam. He was always ready to serve the Sants (holy persons) who visited the local Gurdwara. His wife, Bibi Bholi Kaur, supported her husband's devotion and cooked food for the visiting Sants. In 1866, this couple was blessed with a baby boy, an event that brought great happiness to the family. In the naming ceremony performed in accordance with the Sikh customs, the boy was given the name Attar Singh.

Even as a child, young Attar Singh had a great desire to listen to and learn Gurbani. He refused to go to school and instead went to the local Gurdwara to learn Gurmukhi so that he could read Guru Granth Sahib and thus learn Gurbani. His daily routine consisted of getting up early in the morning, taking a bath and then going to the Gurdwara to listen to Keertan. At the conclusion of morning services in the Gurdwara, he stayed on to receive instruction in Punjabi language from the Granthi (priest). He also devoted a considerable amount of his time memorizing various Banis (Sikh prayers).

Unlike other children of his age, young Attar Singh did not like to waste time in gossip with his playmates, but narrated to them stories of the Gurus. A quiet child, he stayed detached from the worldly affairs. No one ever found him telling a lie or committing a deceitful act. Instead, he spent most of his time learning Gurbani and its meanings. In a short time, he had memorized prayers like Japu Ji, and many shabads (hymns) from Guru Granth Sahib.

Several unusual incidents occurred during his childhood which indicated that Attar Singh would grow up to be an extraordinary person. Often when he went out with some of his friends for grazing their domestic animals, he took out a rosary that he had made with rags and started reciting the "Naam". He also instigated his companions to recite with him. One day while he was grazing his family cows and buffaloes with one of his close friends, Bakhtawar Singh, he went to take a nap under a tree. While Attar Singh was sleeping a roaming ascetic happened to pass by and stopped under the same tree. He looked at the lines under Attar Singh's feet and said to Bakhtawar Singh, "This boy is destined to be a great man. Many Rajas will bow before him".

As he grew older, Attar Singh became more and more inclined towards spiritual pursuits. He spoke very sparsely and only when it was necessary. He spent most of his time alone in the countryside where he found solitude and where he could meditate uninterrupted, for long periods of time. Sometimes he would stay away from home for a couple of days in a row. When his father went out searching for him, he would find him meditating amidst some cluster of trees.

Attar Singh grew up to be a tall, healthy and unusually handsome young man who left a deep impression on everyone he met, not only for his physical appearance, but also for his gentle behaviour and sweet manners. Another young man named Dalel Singh, from the same village was a junior officer (Subedar) in the British Army. Once, when this officer came home on leave, he happened to meet Bhai Attar Singh. He was so impressed with his personality and demeanour that he suggested to him (Attar Singh) to consider joining the army. After considering this proposal for some time, Bhai Attar Singh decided to join the army. He thought that by doing so he would be away from his family and worldly attachments and could therefore devote more time to meditation and contemplation. He then went to his father and mother to seek their permission. When the parents agreed, Bhai Attar Singh enlisted himself in the army in the year 1887.

After the usual army training, followed by a couple of short assignments, he was posted in the 54th Sikh Platoon, stationed in Kohat. As it happened, the Sikh officer from Cheema, who had suggested Attar Singh to join the army, was also attached to the same platoon.

In the time of British Raj, it was mandatory for every Sikh soldier to take 'Khande di Pauhul'. English people were convinced that a Sikh who took 'Khande di Pauhul' excelled in bravery and loyalty. Thus, Bhai Attar Singh also took 'Khande di Pauhul' along with some of his companion soldiers, from Giani Thakur Singh, who was brought specially to Kohat for this purpose. As is the tradition, all recipients of the Pauhul were told to observe the Khalsa Rehat:

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[1] Before the partition of India, Patiala was a princely state. Now it is a part of Punjab province of India.

1. Worship only one God.
2. Recite the credal formula (Gur Mantra) on getting up early in the morning and recite the five prayers.
3. Always keep the five K's on the body (Kesh, Kangha, Kirpan, Karha and Kachh).
4. Always remember the four taboos and always stay clear of them.

Bhai Attar Singh had already known all these commandments and had been practising them. Now he embarked on the spiritual pursuit wholeheartedly. After fulfilling his demanding duties with great diligence and to the best of his ability, whatever spare time he got, he used it in meditation. . Even during his training period, he had proved to be the best shooter in his class. Later on, in an all-India competition for target shooting, he was placed first. With his immaculate conduct and excellent performance of duty, he soon gained the respect of not only his companion soldiers but also his officers.

Subedar Dalel Singh watched him closely from the day he joined his regiment. He soon realized that every action of Bhai Attar Singh was according to the teachings of the Gurus. He felt that it was very difficult for Bhai Attar Singh to carry out all the demanding duties assigned to him and at the same time pursue his spiritual quest. He therefore recommended that Bhai Attar Singh be exempted from the guard duty and instead, assigned to the Gurdwara of the regiment. The Commander, who had great regard for the loyalty of Subedar Dalel Singh, approved his recommendation and Bhai Attar Singh took the responsibility of assisting the Granthi (priest) of the regiment Gurdwara, where he came to stay also. Now all he had to do was to join the morning parade, after which he had all the time to himself.

His daily routine was to get up at two in the morning, take a bath and recite the morning prayers. This he completed before he had to go for the parade. After the parade, he came back to the Gurdwara, cleaned the congregation hall and then, meditated on Naam. By this time some other soldiers would begin arriving at the Gurdwara. Bhai Attar Singh urged them to meditate on Naam and listen to the Keertan which he performed in his melodious voice. The Granthi was so pleased with the seva of Bhai Attar Singh that he taught him the intricacies of the art of meditation.

In this capacity he served the army for four years and with the help of the Granthi and his own hard work, Bhai Attar Singh advanced considerably on the spiritual path. By this time his parents started writing to him to come home, get married and start a family. They even accepted the proposal of Sardar Jawahar Singh of Badrukhan village to get his daughter married to Bhai Attar Singh. When they wrote to Attar Singh about this proposal, he sent his reply saying that Akaal Purakh had already chalked out a plan for his life and marriage had no place in it. He suggested that his younger brother, Bhai Jai Singh, should marry Sardar Jawahar Singh's daughter instead of him. His suggestion was accepted by his parents as well as Sardar and Sardarni Jawahar Singh and Bhai Jai Singh got married.

Bhai Attar Singh had now reached a stage where all worldly pursuits seemed obstacles in his spiritual path. He therefore decided to quit the service and devote all his time towards seeking the Truth. He tendered his resignation, but the colonel in charge of the regiment refused to accept it. He did not want to lose such an efficient and sincere soldier. Bhai Attar Singh, on the other hand, was determined to start leading the life of a seeker of Truth. He was completely detached from the world and did not want to spend even one more day in any kind of bondage. One day, in 1888, he quietly left the cantonment of Dera Ghazi Khan, where his regiment was posted, and started on a pilgrimage of Hazoor Sahib (Nander).

He covered most of this journey, over eight hundred miles, on foot. All through the journey, he kept in mind the memory of the tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh Ji. On reaching Hazoor Sahib, Bhai Attar Singh immersed himself in the service at the Gurdwara Sach Khand. He cleaned the compound of the shrine and helped in the Langar (common kitchen). No task was too difficult for him. He spoke very little and kept reciting Gurbani while carrying out the seva given to him. Within a few days the head priest (Granthi) of the Gurdwara was so impressed with the selfless service of this stranger that he called him (Bhai Attar Singh) and gave him a place to stay in his own Bunga (living quarters) that was situated on the bank of the river Godavari.

Now Bhai Attar Singh had a lodging place not too far from the "Sach Khand Shrine", which gave him more regularity in his life. His first priority was to serve in the Gurdwara and the Langar and to these tasks he gave a major portion of his time. All the rest of the time, apart from a few hours of sleep, he devoted to meditation. There was an empty hut near Gurdwara Nageena Ghat and an old unoccupied cave at Gautam Ghat. He found these places quiet, secluded and to his liking. He practiced meditation at one of these two places. Some nights, instead of sleeping, he sat on the bank of the river Godavari and meditated. His daily diet consisted of only one *roti* (piece of flat bread) with a little vegetable curry or *daal* (lentil soup). Within a few months he completed one hundred and twenty five thousand recitations of Japu Ji at these two spots. He then went to Heera Ghat, visited the Gurdwara of Mata Sahib Kaur there and then moved on to Shikar Ghat. Where he spent about three months, observing the same routine of meditation. During this period he completed another twenty five thousand recitations of Japu Ji.

Once Bhai Attar Singh went a few miles upstream and sat there in meditation on the bank of the river Godavari. He got so immersed in meditation that he became totally oblivious of time. Five or six days passed by without him having any food or water. It is said that the head priest of the Sach Khand Gurdwara had a dream in which someone showed him the place where Bhai Attar Singh was sitting in meditation and told him to send some food and water because this Sikh (Attar Singh) had not had any food for almost a week. In the morning, the priest took some food and clothing to where Bhai Attar Singh was still sitting in meditation. He covered him with the blanket to give some warmth to his body. Then he shook him out of his meditation and served him some food.

Bhai Attar Singh's intense desire was to have a sight of the tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh Ji. But, even after all this meditation and penitence this desire remained unfulfilled and no miracles happened. In his disappointment he decided to take his life. With this decision, he entered the river and proceeded towards the middle of the stream where the water was deep. When he reached to where the water was neck deep and was about to take the next step to drown himself, he heard a voice telling him that what he was going to do was against the teachings of the Gurus. Then the voice asked him what did he want?

Bhai Attar Singh replied, "I want Darshan (vision) of Guru Gobind Singh Ji sitting in his court the way he did when he was at Anandpur". The voice asked him to come to Nagina Ghat at midnight that night and his wish would be granted. Bhai Attar Singh came out of the water and eagerly waited for the promised hour. At midnight, he reached Nagina Ghat. He was amazed to see the tenth Master on a throne surrounded by all the Sikh warriors. As Bhai Attar Singh prostrated before the tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh put his hand on Attar Singh's head and said, "Your meditation and recitations of Japu Ji have been accepted by Guru Nanak; now go and spend the rest of your life in spreading the Guru's word".

Soon after this incredible experience, Sant Attar Singh returned to Punjab - this time again travelling on foot. Wherever he stayed on the way, he preached the teachings of the Gurus. He had to pass through deep forests infested with ferocious beasts like tigers and cheetahs and he did have at least one encounter with a tiger; but the tiger passed by without even looking towards him. In this homeward journey, he passed through Khandwa, Ujjain, Pushkar Nath and Mathura and finally reached Hardwar on the occasion of the "Kumbh fair". This fair which is held after every twelve years at Hardwar, is attended by millions of pilgrims. Sants from all parts of the country gather there at this occasion. During his stay at Hardwar, Sant Attar Singh Ji met Bhai Kishan Singh of Abda village. He had stayed at Cheema village for some time and knew Sant Ji's family. He told Sant Attar Singh Ji that his father had passed away in 1887 and that his mother was longing to see him. Sant Ji, who had attained the state of equipoise and was now happy in the will of Akaal Purakh, said, "I would go to the village as and when Akaal Purakh directs me to do so". He had absolutely no desire for acquiring any worldly possessions, therefore except a couple of personal clothes he did not carry anything else with him. If someone offered him something, he gave it away to some beggar. His diet was minimal, barely enough to keep him strong enough to carry on his journey and to meditate on Naam most of the time.

From Hardwar he went to Rishikesh. He stayed at Rishikesh for about a year. During this period, he met Sant Ram Singh, who happened to have his Dera at Sialkot in Punjab. Sant Attar Singh Ji found him to be a very pious person who had set goals in his life that were similar to his own. Sant Ram Singh asked Sant Attar Singh Ji to accompany him to Sialkot at his Dera. To this Sant Attar Singh Ji agreed readily; because in spite of all efforts at meditation he felt that still there was something lacking in his life, and he hoped that in the company of a pious person like Sant Ram Singh he might be able to discover what was lacking.

The two holy persons started on foot from Rishikesh and passing through Paonta Sahib and the state of Nahan, reached Sialkot. Sant Attar Singh Ji spent some time at Sialkot; but in his mind, he always thought that he was a deserter from the army. This thought always bothered his conscience and would not let him concentrate on meditation. He therefore decided to go back to his regiment, which was stationed at Abbotabad, and accept whatever punishment was meted to him.

On reaching Abbotabad he went straight to the colonel in charge of the regiment and requested him for a discharge after any punishment that the colonel thought was appropriate for his desertion. The colonel, who already had a great regard for Sant Attar Singh for his efficiency and piety, was further convinced of his (Attar Singh's) loyalty because of his coming back of his own accord. He suggested to Sant Attar Singh to join the platoon so that he may drop the charge of desertion against him. However, Sant Attar Singh told the colonel that he had dedicated his life to the Guru's service and could not rejoin the army under any circumstances. The colonel got annoyed and ordered Attar Singh to be placed in solitary confinement. Sant Ji spent that whole night sitting in meditation. The junior commissioned officer on night duty noticed the way Sant Ji had passed the night. Next morning he went to the colonel and told him that he was punishing a holy man who had no aptitude for army service and who would not change his mind in spite of any harsh punishment. The colonel became convinced and gave Sant Attar Singh discharge from the army. Some money was also due to him, which was given to him at the time of his discharge. He distributed this money among the poor and left Abbotabad. Now he felt that the emptiness that he had been feeling within had vanished. The load from his conscience had been lifted and for the first time in a long while, he felt inner satisfaction.

From Abbotabad he went to Panja Sahib for pilgrimage. Then he toured the adjoining area and finally came to Amritsar. While at Amritsar, he received a message from his mother asking him to come home. He immediately obeyed his mother's command and went to his village. However, he did not go to his house but stayed outside the village and informed his family of his arrival. His mother came to see him daily and brought food for him. This routine continued for a few days. One day the mother asked Sant Attar Singh to come to the house and stay there for some time. Sant Ji said, "Mother, I must obey your order and therefore will come to the house. But I will do so on the condition that I will not be compelled to get married". The mother agreed and Sant Ji went to his house and started staying there. He also started teaching Japu Ji to his mother. This way a few months passed peacefully. One day his mother said, "How nice would it be if you fulfil my last desire before I die - my only desire now is that you get married and start a family". That very night Sant Attar Singh left his village and within a few days reached Sialkot at the Dera of his old friend Sant Ram Singh.

After spending some time at Sialkot he went to Rawalpindi and Panja Sahib and then reached Kanoha village and stayed at the local Gurdwara for a few days. At some distance from this village, there was a thick cluster of trees in the middle of which there was a spring of fresh water. When Sant Ji saw this place he felt it to be a very suitable site for meditation and decided to stay there for some time. When the villagers came to know of his decision, they warned him that close to the spring there lived a very large and ferocious snake; as a result no one dared go within the cluster of the trees. Sant Ji ignored this warning, entered the cluster and sat on the bank of the spring for meditation. The year was 1893 and Sant Ji was 27 years old.

After a couple of days a devoted couple, Bhai Vazir Singh and his wife Bibi Bhag Bhari, who had listened to Sant Ji's keertan at the Gurdwara and were immensely impressed by his pious personality, started worrying about his well-being because of the rumoured presence of the snake near the spring. They went to the spring and saw Sant Ji sitting in deep meditation. They had brought some food also because they knew that no one had entered the cluster after Sant Ji had gone in. They served him the food when he opened his eyes. Now Bhai Vazir Singh and his wife started bringing food everyday. After some time they had a hut (kuttiaa) constructed there (as a shelter from rain and dust storms) and then installed Guru Granth Sahib also in this hut. Sant Attar Singh Ji locked himself inside the hut and stopped seeing anyone. Bhai Vazir Singh continued to bring food daily and placed it outside the hut. Sant Ji picked it up only after the person who brought it had left. For forty days this routine continued after which the door of the hut was opened. However, it was only for a few days because Sant Ji closed the door again, this time for six months. During this period he practiced intense meditation. A cup of milk in the morning and a small portion of some vegetable curry was all, he consumed daily. This way he passed about a year in that small hut absorbed in meditation. Now he had attained a very high spiritual level.

The fame of Sant Attar Singh Ji started spreading in the adjoining villages and towns. Many people started coming to see this recluse and listen to him, but most of them went away without having their desire fulfilled because Sant Ji came out of the hut only for a few moments to pick up the food that was placed outside the door and did not talk to anyone present there. For his natural needs he went out late at night after everyone had left. Some came with certain desires in their mind and waited for long hours till they got the Darshan (sight) of Sant Ji. Some of them had their desires fulfilled; which they attributed to the miraculous powers of Sant Ji's Darshan. Many such stories spread in the adjoining villages. Thus as time passed, the number of visitors kept on increasing. After one year, when he opened the door of the hut, a very large number of devotees had gathered outside to pay homage to this holy man. Several Ragi Jathas (groups of congregational singers) had also arrived. A congregational meeting was held in which these Ragi Jathas did the Keertan. Langar was also prepared at the site and distributed. Sant Ji delivered a short sermon in which he emphasized that to be a Sikh one must live one's life according to the teachings of the Gurus. His words, substantiated by Gurbani passages were very convincing and had a deep effect on all present in the congregation. After the Langar, leaders of many adjoining villages came and requested him to visit them and preach in their villages. One of the Ragi Jathas offered their services to stay with him to do the Keertan. Sant Attar Singh kept quiet for a few minutes and then said, "This life is now dedicated to spread the message of the Gurus. I will go wherever Guru Nanak takes me and will preach whatever he tells me".

He travelled through the rural area of Pothohar (Northwest part of Punjab, now in Pakistan), Baar (Central Southwest of Punjab, now in Pakistan), the Doabas (Areas between the rivers Raavi and Chenab, now a part of Pakistan and between Beas and Raavi, now a part of India), Malwa (Southeast of Punjab, now a part of India), the states of Nabha, Patiala, Jind, Sangrur, Malerkotla and many cities of Punjab. He also visited the provinces of Sind, U.P., Bihar, Delhi, and the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

He had a very sweet and melodious voice and his words had a magnetic effect on the audience. He always preached the fundamentals of Sikhism - to have an unshakeable faith in one God, to recite Gurbani, to meditate on Naam and to live an honest life of a householder, staying clear of the five maladies (lust, wrath, greed, worldly attachment and ego). His magnetic personality brought many into the fold of Sikhism. Thousands of Sikhs on his urging took "Khande di Pauhul" and joined the brotherhood of Khalsa. Even many Muslims came to attend his congregational meetings and benefited from his sermons. Many people came to him to get their doubts removed. He always quoted from Guru Granth Sahib to answer their questions and explained even very difficult passages in such a way that all the listeners went completely satisfied.

Sant Attar Singh Ji always upheld the Sikh tradition of Langar. Wherever he went, no matter how many people came to attend his congregational meeting, the Langar was always more than enough. In the beginning, he never kept anything out of the offerings that he received in the congregational meetings. Every penny was given to the Gurdwara where he was staying. Later on, however, when he started two major construction projects, one at Mastuana, of Gurdwara Gursagar and the second one at Damdama Sahib, the offerings received were used there. He was also an enthusiastic supporter of education and helped in starting many schools in the rural areas of Punjab[2].

His daily routine was to get up at midnight and meditate for over an hour. At about 1:30 AM, after taking bath, he recited the daily Sikh prayers (Japu Ji, Jaap Sahib, Sawaiyyas, Chaupai and Anand Sahib). By the time he finished saying his daily prayers, the Ragis started the keertan of *Aasa di Vaar* in the congregational hall. After the completion of the keertan of *Aasa di Vaar* he himself sang some shabads. The whole congregation joined in his singing. Then he explained the meaning of the Gurbani shabad that he had sung. He always preached the importance for every Sikh to take "Khande di Pauhul". Very often the ceremony of administration of the Pauhul was carried out immediately after his sermon; because many people, after listening to his sermon came forward to receive the Pauhul. At the conclusion of the morning congregational meeting, he went for a walk with one of his disciples. At lunch he came to the langar and sat with everyone else (in Pangat) and sang some shabads before the food was served. Here also, all present followed him in the singing. After the Langar he went to his room and sat in meditation. In the afternoon he took a bath again and then came to the congregation hall for the evening meeting. After the Keertan and recitation of the prayer of Sodar-Rehras, everyone proceeded to the Langar hall where the food was served. Following this he went to his room and at about 10:00 PM, went to bed.

In all his sermons, Sant Attar Singh Ji laid particular stress on the necessity for a Sikh to take "Khande di Pauhul". According to him, if a Sikh wanted to make his/her life useful, it was essential that he/she should be "Amritdhari". In his life Sant Ji initiated several hundred thousand men and women to "Khande di Pauhul". These included several rulers of the (erstwhile) states, many Sindhis and Arya Samajis. Once when Sant Ji was at Faridkot, the prisoners of the state prison expressed a desire to see him. The Raja being a disciple of Sant Ji, gave his permission. Sant Attar Singh Ji went to the prison along with the prison officials. A congregational meeting was arranged within the prison enclave. Guru Granth Sahib was installed and Keertan and Gurbani discourses were delivered. At the end of the meeting one hundred forty prisoners expressed their desire to take "Khande di Pauhul". Sant Ji agreed to this request after a prison official took the responsibility to provide all the facilities to the prisoners to maintain the rehat. According to Sant Ji, all sins could be annulled by taking Khande di Pauhul, recitation of Gurbani and leading a clean life according to the Sikh tenets.

One day a farmer got into arguments with some other villagers. In the heat of argument he made an insulting gesture with his bamboo stick towards Guru Granth Sahib. All his friends rebuked him to the extent that he somehow wanted to be forgiven for this sin. They brought him to Sant Attar Singh Ji, who after listening to the story said, "You can be forgiven if you take Khande di Pauhul, promise to recite the daily prayers for the rest of your life and lead the life of an exemplary Sikh". He also warned the farmer that a false promise to the Guru would further aggravate his sin and for that he would be punished here, in this world as well as in the hereafter. The farmer agreed, took Khande di Pauhul and became a devoted Sikh.

While Sant Attar Singh Ji preached taking of Khande di Pauhul, he also preached that taking it was only the first step whereby the external form changed. This had little benefit unless the receiving person also improved his conduct in life and led his/her life according to the teachings of the Gurus. The goal of a person in life was to get imbued in Akaal Purakh's Name. By reciting daily prayers like a parrot, without understanding and acting upon what they professed, carried no merit[3]. This was essentially the sermon which Sant Ji delivered at the time of administration of Khande di Pauhul.

Sant Attar Singh Ji believed that recitation of Gurbani with full concentration of mind and body had the power of making miracles. It could fulfil even worldly desires, cure uncurable diseases and solve all kinds of problems in life. It is well known that in his lifetime he successfully used this recipe on thousands of devotees with hundred percent positive results. In the Malwa tract of Punjab where there was a lack of missionary work, Sant Ji paid special attention. As a result of his efforts hundreds of Gurdwaras were constructed in villages and thousands of people took Khande di Pauhul and regularly started reciting Gurbani. They gave up liquor and other intoxicants and stopped using abusive language.

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[2] Because of this interest of Sant Attar Singh Ji, his disciple and heir, Sant Teja Singh (M.A.) started a high standard academy at Baru Sahib for education of boys and girls. Today branches of this academy have been opened in many towns of Punjab.

[3] These prayers teach that one must lead a clean life, free from the five maladies, give tithe to charitable projects, believe in and act on the teachings of the Gurus and stay away from evil company.

One day, when Sant Ji was visiting the city of Hyderabad, in the province of Sind, he happened to pass by the local mental institution. He expressed a desire to see the mentally sick people. The person who was in charge of the institution, happened to have heard of Sant Ji's reputation and gave permission for him to visit. When Sant Ji went inside, the patients were making all kind of noises and talking all kinds of senseless talk. Sant Ji sat down and started singing a shabad (hymn) from Guru Granth Sahib. Soon all the inmates sat down around him with their eyes closed. At the conclusion of the shabad Sant Ji told the gentleman in charge, that by the miraculous power of Gurbani all patients had been cured of their maladies. On his urging the doctors came and examined all the patients. They were amazed to find that what Sant Ji had said was true. Every one of the patients had been cured of his disease. All of them were discharged to go home.

Once, Sant Attar Singh Ji visited Kohat, in the Northwest Frontier Province, on an invitation from the Sangat there. On his arrival, some devotees came to the railway station to receive him. From the railway station they took a *tonga* (a two wheel horse driven cart) to go to the city. On the way a few Pathans saw Sant Ji. From his attire and appearance they thought him to be a holy person. They stopped the tonga, and said something in their language (Pushto). One of the devotees, who was travelling with him, told Sant Ji that they were requesting Sant Ji to pray for rain, because for the past three years it had not rained there and if it did not rain this year also, their children would starve. Sant Ji asked the devotee to convey to them to go home and pray to God for rain. However, the Pathans kept standing and repeating their request. At that point Sant Ji started singing a Shabad from Guru Granth Sahib. According to an eye witness report, within a short time a dust storm developed and then it started raining.

A similar miracle is also known to have occurred at Jaito. After the successful conclusion of agitation of Jaito, a large congregational

meeting was held to express gratitude to the Guru for the success. Sant Attar Singh Ji was singing in the congregation. Some organizers of the meeting requested him to supplicate to the Guru for rain because it had not rained there for the past couple of years. Sant Ji started a new Gurbani shabad and within a few minutes a heavy rainstorm developed. Several such miracles are associated with Sant Attar Singh Ji in which, not just the natural phenomena, but human beings, animals and even plants obeyed his command and acted according to his wishes.

Sant Attar Singh Ji had a great respect for Gurbani and Guru Granth Sahib. Wherever there was a procession with the inclusion of Guru Granth Sahib he never accepted a ride in spite of repeated requests from the organizers. Instead, he always walked in front of the palanquin of Guru Granth Sahib and sang shabads. He was a very humble person who did not like people bowing before him, specially, in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib. Once he spent an unusually long time bowing towards Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple sanctum sanctorium) from the Parikarma. When asked, he replied that too many people bowed before him everyday. He was passing on the load of all those obeisances to the Guru.

Not only Sikhs but Hindus and even Muslims also revered him. Many Hindu ascetics and Muslim faqirs visited and accorded him great respect. Once while on his missionary tour he had to stop overnight in the village 'Menind'. This village belonged to Brahmins and there was no Sikh family living there. According to his daily routine (Nitnem), he started the evening congregational meeting. Several Brahmins, out of curiosity, came to attend the meeting. They were so affected by the sermon of Sant Ji that they requested Sant Ji to stay there for some time. Sant Ji agreed to this request and stayed in that village for some time. Before he was leaving about fifty Brahmins requested and took Khande di Pauhul and Sant Ji laid the foundation stone of the Gurdwara which was later on constructed there.

Often Hindus invited him to their temples too. To such requests he always agreed and even in the temples gave discourses on Gurbani. Many Sants belonging to different sects invited him to their Deras and monasteries. Sant Ji never refused and wherever he went he sang Shabads from Guru Granth Sahib and gave discourses on Gurbani.

In 1911 when King George V came to India, a great court was held at

Delhi in the red fort in connection with his coronation. The maharajas of all the states in India came to attend the court and pay their respects to the King. Some Rajas of Sikh states in Punjab, who were devotees of Sant Ji, requested him to accompany them to Delhi. Sant Ji agreed and a special camp on the bank of river Jamuna was set up for him. This camp was at some distance from the camp where all the Rajas were staying. Guru Granth Sahib was installed in a large tent and morning and evening congregational meetings were held there. Many Rajas came to attend these meetings, paid obeisance to Guru Granth Sahib and Sant Ji and listened to his spiritual discourses on Gurbani. On the day of the grand court when the Rajas were ready to go to the court in the form of a procession, a special carriage drawn by four horses was provided for Sant Ji. On reaching the court a special seat on the right side of where the Rajas were being seated, was provided for him. When King George V entered the court, everyone stood up as an expression of respect. But Sant Ji kept sitting. The King, while passing by Sant Ji's seat, saw that he had not stood up. He asked who the gentleman was. On being told that he was a holy man of the Sikh community, the king as a token of respect took off his hat. The next day in the big procession, Sant Attar Singh Ji was seated on a decorated elephant, ahead of all the Rajas, as an indication of the reverence in which Sant Ji was held all over India.

In 1914 Salagram Singh, a leading citizen of Benaras, invited Sant Attar Singh Ji to visit there. The real purpose of this invitation was to have the foundation stone of the Benaras Hindu University laid by him. On reaching Benaras, Sant Ji was given the red carpet treatment. Several Rajas of the adjoining states had also arrived there for the occasion. They all came to receive him and expressed their respect by bowing before him. He was then taken to the site selected for the construction of the University campus, where he was requested to lay the foundation stone of the University. Sant Ji agreed to this request on the condition that before the ceremony, an Akhand Paath should be performed. To this, the management committee agreed and the Akhand Paath was started the same day. On the conclusion of the Paath, a large congregational meeting was held after which Sant Ji laid the foundation stone.

After the successful completion of the Gurdwara movement in which

Akalis took possession of various historical Gurdwaras in Punjab, Sant Ji was invited to Nanakana Sahib where hundreds of Sikhs had been martyred by being mercilessly butchered by the cohorts of the mahant Narain Das, the in charge of the shrine. Sant Ji went there and for the first time in his life, he donned a black turban in the memory of the martyrs. All his companions also put on black turbans.

Soon thereafter this, the possession of Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple) was also taken by Akalis. Sant Ji was then requested to initiate the *"Kaar Seva"* of cleaning of the lake Amritsar (Sarovar). On reaching Amritsar he was taken in a large procession to Darbar Sahib. Thousands of devotees, on hearing that Sant Attar Singh Ji was going to start the Kaar Seva, had reached ahead of his arrival and joined the procession. The next day Sant Ji filled the first basket of dirt from the bottom of the 'Sarovar' and carried it on his head. Thus the cleaning process of the lake (Sarovar) Amritsar was initiated.

In the year 1901 Sant Attar Singh Ji was staying in the village Kajhala in the Malwa area of Punjab. As was his daily routine, one day he went for a walk after the morning congregational meeting. But this day he took an unusually long walk. Suddenly, at some distance he saw a luxuriant cluster of trees. He walked further and entered the cluster. The accompanying devotee (Sevadar) was surprised when Sant Ji said, "This is it. This is the place I have been looking for. One day it will become a place of pilgrimage and a centre of Sikh mission". He then told the accompanying Sevadar that during one of his long travels, Guru Nanak had visited there.

On his return from his walk he asked his devotees in the village to build a hut in that cluster of trees. As soon as the hut was constructed Guru Granth Sahib was installed and congregational meetings (morning as well as evening) began to be held there. With these meetings came the Langar also. Soon a large number of devotees started attending these daily meetings. In one congregational meeting Sant Ji suggested that a tank (Sarovar) should be excavated at the site, and after the meeting he took the shovel and dug the first basket of dirt to initiate the excavation. Many devotees who foresaw that Sant Ji had the intention of staying permanently at that place, decided to dedicate their lives in the service of Sant Ji. They were joined by many visiting members of the congregation in the excavation of the Sarovar and soon the sarovar (tank) was completed.

People in the adjoining villages were extremely happy that Sant Ji had decided to establish a Dera there because ever since he had set foot in the area many villagers had given up liquor and other intoxicants and the crime had decreased considerably. They donated land for the Dera and for a brick kiln so that the permanent buildings could be constructed for the Dera. Similarly other adjoining villages took responsibility to supply wood for the kiln. Very soon a congregational hall, a Langar hall, a room for Sant Ji and several small rooms for the devotees were constructed. On completion of the construction an Akhand Paath (non-stop recitation of the whole Guru Granth Sahib) was completed. At the conclusion of the Akhand Paath and the congregational meeting the commandment message (Vaak) that came from Guru Granth Sahib was:

ਗੁਰੁ ਸਾਗਰੁ ਰਤਨੀ ਭਰਪੂਰੇ ॥ (SGGS, p. 685)
Which means:
Guru, the holy preceptor, is like a lake, full of pearls (virtues).

At this, Sant Ji said, "The name of the Sarovar should be "Gur Sagar"; which name also became known for the Dera. After some time, a building for a college was constructed on the site adjoining the Dera and a blue ribbon committee of five members was selected to run the affairs of the college[4].

As the news of establishment of the Dera and construction of the Sarovar spread, many devotees offered their services - some with money and others with their labour. The Maharaja of Patiala offered to pay for all the expenses of the project but Sant Ji declined and said, "This project must be shared by all devotees and not one single person who would most probably become proud that he financed the whole big project. Since ego is not accepted in the house of Guru Nanak, therefore instead of profit he would incur loss in this transaction".

In the beginning of the construction Sant Ji kept a strict control on

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[4] The committee consisted of two Rajas of states and three prominent Sardars. However, unfortunately because of egos of the committee members, it did not work out well and the college did not run properly.

all aspects of the project including the food that was served to the volunteers who were working there. Very simple and barely enough food was served. No food was allowed to be brought from the adjoining villages in spite of repeated requests from the villagers. Sant Ji said, "I want to see who really is doing selfless service". However, once the project was complete this restriction was lifted and elaborate Langar started being served. After the completion of work at Gur Sagar, Sant Ji went to Damdama Sahib; where he took over the responsibility of enlargement of the Sarovar.

A large number of devotees always followed Sant Ji wherever he went. Thus, the congregational meetings were always very heavily attended and the offerings were also proportionately large. Sant Ji himself never had any attachment to money or other worldly materials; all the offerings were passed on to the local Gurdwaras. This way Sant Ji helped in renovation and construction of many Gurdwaras and schools in the Malwa area.

After the Akalis took over the management of all the historic Gurdwaras of Punjab they came to Sant Ji and asked him to hand over the management of Gur Sagar also to them. Sant Ji, who had absolutely no attachment with any worldly possessions, immediately agreed to this demand. He called all the devotees who lived at the Dera and told them to leave the place taking with them nothing except their personal clothes. He then handed over the keys to the Akalis, left the place along with all the devotees, and embarked on a missionary tour of Punjab. Soon, however, the Akalis realized that all the income of the Dera for which they were eager to take its possession, was due to the presence of Sant Attar Singh Ji. Once he left, hardly any devotees came to the place-all income dried up. The Akalis could not bear all the expenses to run the Dera and went to Sant Ji with the request that he should take back the possession of Gursagar Dera.

As already mentioned, Sant Attar Singh Ji had absolutely no attachment with worldly materials. Many times in winter when he saw a poor person who did not have adequate warm clothes, he took off his woollen shawl and gave it to him. He once gave away the pair of his shoes to a poor person who just expressed the desire to have them.

To Sant Ji, rich and poor were alike. He never preferred to visit rich devotees' homes, but always looked at the faith and sincerity of the inviting person. Once when he was staying as a guest of the Maharaja of Patiala, a poor old lady requested him to visit her house. Sant Ji immediately agreed to go to her house and hold a congregational meeting there. When people came to know of this decision of Sant Ji they brought food for the Langar because they knew that the old lady could not afford to provide Langar for such a large gathering.

Once Sant Ji went to Amritsar to do Keertan (hymn singing) in the sanctum sanctorium of the Golden temple (Harimandir Sahib). The head priest, out of sheer jealousy, but on the pretext that he sang "kachi Bani", did not allow him to sing there. Sant Ji quietly went out and started Keertan in the Guru ka Bagh. A large number of devotees came to attend his keertan and a very substantial amount of money, in the form of offerings piled up there. The priests, on hearing that Sant Ji had attracted such a large number of devotees, came to Guru Ka Bagh. They could not believe their eyes when they saw the amount of money piled up in front of Guru Granth Sahib and wished that all that money were offered in Harimandir Sahib. At the conclusion of the meeting Sant Ji called them and asked them to take away all the money. The priests shamelessly gathered the money and went away.

Wherever Sant Attar Singh Ji went he preached the tenets of Sikhism and stressed that everyone should take Khande di Pauhul. There were certain points, however, which he particularly emphasized. These were:

1. Accept the will of God without grudge or complaint.
2. Get up early in the morning and recite Gurbani loudly to ward off sleep.
3. Accept the word of Gurus as eternal truth without doubt or criticism.
4. Consider all human beings to be equal in that the same light dwells in everyone. Only external physical differences make people look different.
5. About corporeal Guru he used to say, "There never was a corporeal Guru. Even when the Gurus were in their physical form, it was the 'Shabad', that in reality reigned. Now we have the Shabad Guru, Guru Granth Sahib".

6. Taking a bath in the morning is very important. Having meals at the proper time is even more important. But, the most important chore in human life is to contemplate Akaal Purakh's Name. An equally important chore is to help someone who is needy and is incapable of helping himself.

In 1926 on the occasion of Baisakhi when Sant Ji was doing Keertan at Damdama Sahib, the theme of the concluding shabad that he sang, was vairag (detachment). This was unusual because Baisakhi, being the birthday of the Khalsa, is an occasion of rejoicing for the Sikhs. The next day again, when he did Keertan, he sang the shabad:

ਨਦੀਆ ਵਾਹ ਵਿਛੁੰਨਿਆ ਮੇਲਾ ਸੰਜੋਗੀ ਰਾਮ ॥ (SGGS, p. 439)

Which means:

Once rivers are diverged from their course, they may meet again only by good fortune. Symbolically he was trying to convey that he may not meet this congregation again.

After departing from Damdama Sahib he visited Gujranwala, Sialkot, Jammu, Pehalgam and Sri Nagar (Kashmir). As was his daily routine, wherever he went he did Keertan in the congregational meetings. But this time he often sang the same Shabad, indicating that probably this was the last time he was visiting that place.

It was the month of July, 1926, when he was sitting next to the Ragis in the congregation in Gurdwara Bala Sahib in New Delhi when a snake came in the congregation hall and proceeded directly to where Sant Ji was sitting. Sant Ji told the sevadars to let the snake come. When the snake reached near Sant Ji, he extended his leg towards it. The snake bit his foot and returned the way it had come. Sant Ji said that there was no need of any medical treatment for the snakebite because only the big toe where it had bitten bore a dark spot. Some devotees, however, called a prominent doctor who put and incision at the point where the snake had bitten and bandaged the big toe after applying medicine. This resulted in pain which increased as the days passed. Another doctor was then called who again made a deeper incision but this did not improve the situation.

Sant Ji then left New Delhi and went to Balewala village in Malwa where he stayed for two and a half months. In spite of excruciating pain and visibly worsening condition of the wound Sant Ji performed his daily routine of doing Keertan and Gurbani discourses in the congregation with a smiling face and without a break. Many doctors and Ayurvedic Vaids who were devotees of Sant Ji came to treat him as soon as they heard of the malady. He never refused any treatment but always told them that there was no cure for his condition.

Six months passed during which time many doctors and Vaids came and tried all kinds of antidotes on the wound, but the condition kept on worsening. In January of 1927 Sant Ji implicitly declared in the congregation that his time of merger into the infinite was not too far. Then he went into seclusion. Only devotees who were very close to him were allowed to enter the room where he had confined himself.

One day some officers of the Raja of Sangrur came and insisted that the Raja had sent them specifically for the purpose of taking Sant Ji to Sangrur for proper treatment. On their repeated request Sant Ji took two of his closest devotees with him and accompanied the state officers. On reaching Sangrur the state surgeon, after examining the wound, said that an operation was necessary for curing the wound which by then had increased considerably in size. Sant Ji agreed to undergo the surgery but refused to have any anaesthesia administered to him. So the operation was performed.

After the operation Sant Ji said, "Now I do not want anyone to come to my room. I want to meditate and do not want any interruption". He then went into his room and closed the door. The next night he discarded his body to merge into the Supreme Soul, Akaal Purakh. It was the first week of February, 1927 and Sant Ji was 61 years old at that time.

The body of Sant Attar Singh Ji was brought to Gur Sagar. Thousands of devotees converged on Gur Sagar to have a last glimpse of this Gurmukh. One hundred and one Akhand Paaths were completed at Gur Sagar and all over the country; wherever there were devotees of Sant Ji, Akhand Paaths were completed.

During his life time, from time to time, Sant Attar Singh Ji had promised some close devotees that when he departed this world, he would take them also along with him. As though by some miracle, soon after his departure, all the devotees to whom he had made this promise, also left for their heavenly abodes.

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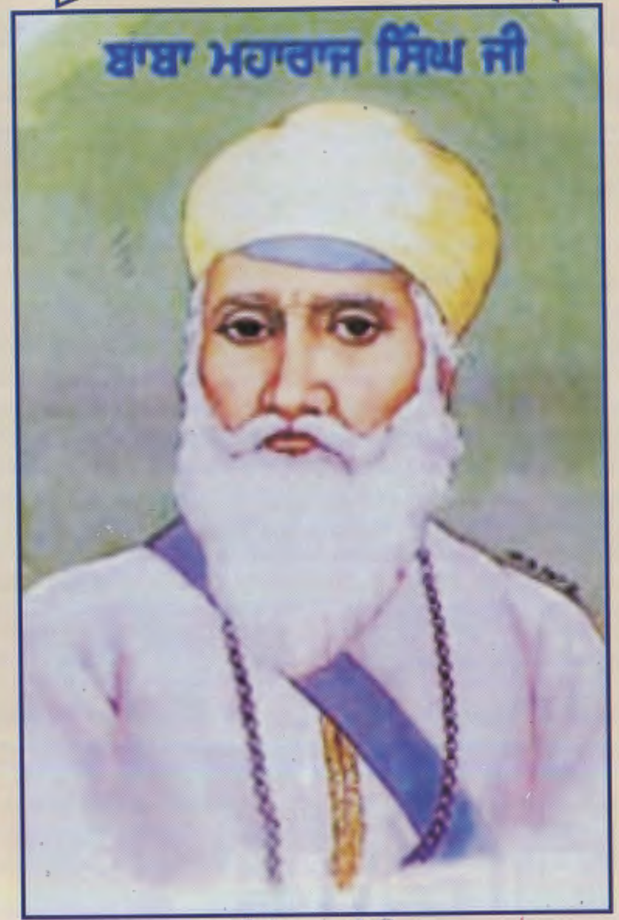
Sant Baba Maharaj Singh Ji



SANT BABA MAHARAJ SINGH JI

In the blessed land of Punjab where the ten Gurus spread the word of unity of God and brotherhood of all human beings, the tract of Malwa holds special historical significance for the Sikhs. It is in this area that Guru Gobind Singh Ji wrote Zafarnama and completed the Guru Granth Sahib in the present form. The battle of Mukatsar was fought here and the great holocaust of Sikhs also took place in this area. Great warriors like Baba Deep Singh also came from this area. In this land, sanctified with the blood of innumerable Sikh martyrs, an unusual baby was born in 1780 CE in the village Rabbo (later on known as Kookian di Rabbo), in Ludhiana district in a highly respectable Sikh family. The parents gave him the name Nihal Singh.

Those were the days when the memory of the great holocaust was fresh[1] in the minds of the Sikhs. This event seems to have acted as a catalyst in that within a few decades Khalsa rose like 'Phoenix' from its ashes and within a short period, under the able guidance of Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, defeated the Pathan armies, which until then were considered invincible, and by the turn of the century a Khalsa empire was established by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Mothers were still singing to their children the lullabies describing the exemplary bravery of Sikhs in those precarious times.

From very early days in his life Nihal Singh was exposed to an environment full of devotion to Sikh Gurus and pride in the sacrifices of innumerable Sikh martyrs. This had a profound effect on the psyche of young Nihal Singh. He developed an unsatiating desire to learn more about the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib and the history of great Sikh warriors and martyrs. As a result of listening to the stories of great martyrs and devoted Sikhs from his mother and elders of the village, to lead his life according to the path delineated by the Gurus became his obsession.

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[1] According to historical records over sixty percent of the total Sikh population was annihilated at the hands of the Pathan army of Ahmad Shah Ibdali in this horrible event, which occurred in 1762. Abdali is known to have boasted that he had completely exterminated the Sikhs and in future there would not be a single follower of Nanak or Gobind Singh on the face of this earth.

His parents sent him to the local Gurdwara for preliminary education in Punjabi and Sikh history. This, the brilliant and eager to learn student completed in a very short time. For further education, he was then sent to the Dera of Baba Tota Singh, a Nirmala sant, at village Theekriwala. Baba Samund Singh a very learned and pious person was incharge of the Dera at that time. He talked to young Nihal Singh and immediately judged the capabilities and ambitions of this young boy to become a great person in his life. He therefore started training Nihal Singh accordingly so that in a short period he became well versed in Sikh philosophy and history. When Baba Samund Singh was satisfied that Nihal Singh had acquired all that was necessary to embark upon a more advanced spiritual path, he called him one day and said, "Now I will take you to Baba Bir Singh in Naurangabad who will further hone your intellectual and spiritual attributes by putting you through 'Seva' and teaching you intricacies of *Naam Simran* and *Bhakti*".

Shortly thereafter Baba Bir Singh happened to visit the town of Mahana, which was not far from Theekriwala. Baba Samund Singh took Nihal Singh to Mahana, presented him to Baba Bir Singh Ji and said, "I have brought a very promising young disciple who I think will prove himself worthy of your seva". Baba Bir Singh smiled and asked Nihal Singh a few questions, to which Nihal Singh gave very appropriate answers. Baba Ji was extremely impressed with Nihal Singh's knowledge of Sikh philosophy, his humility and calm and even temper. He accepted him (Nihal Singh) as his disciple and gave him duty in the langar (common kitchen). But before he could start on his newly assigned duty he was duly initiated to Khalsa brotherhood by taking "Khande di Pauhul". At that time Baba Bir Singh said to Nihal Singh, "By taking Amrit you are taking a vow that hereafter you will dedicate each breath of your life in the service of Satguru. In other words, you will live every moment of your life according to the injunctions of Satguru. If your mind always stays alert according to Guru's instructions then your heart and thoughts will stay free from getting polluted. Gradually your mind will become immaculately clean and you will be able to perceive the presence of Akaal Purakh within".

Bhai Nihal Singh listened to each word of Sant Baba Bir Singh Ji carefully and felt that it touched something within him. He decided there and then to embark upon the path of selfless service of fellow human beings and follow each word of Gurbani with unshakeable faith. This, he believed, would lead him to a higher realm of spirituality and ultimately to emancipation. Thus with great enthusiasm he took over the duty assigned to him in the langar as suggested by Baba Bir Singh.

It would not be out of place to mention here that Baba Bir Singh was a truly enlightened person who had made his life's mission to wake up the masses from the slumber of worldly attachments by preaching the meaning of Gurbani and bringing them into the folds of Khalsa brotherhood by administering "Khande di Pauhul"[2]. Not only had he himself achieved an exalted spiritual state but even those disciples of his who followed his directions without questioning him also achieved enlightenment. Names of Baba Khuda Singh and Baba Patasa Singh are worth honourable mention among such blessed souls. Bhai Nihal Singh thought himself to be fortunate to have succeeded in coming under the tutelage of Baba Bir Singh Ji. This thought itself gave him immense energy and a feeling of exhilaration. He felt as if he had taken a new birth. He merged himself into seva (service) and meditation wholeheartedly and soon became envy of many senior disciples of Baba Bir Singh Ji.

Bhai Nihal Singh was so humble and his way of talking so respectful that he addressed everyone as "Maharaj" (a term of extreme respect). This soon became his trademark and gradually everyone started addressing him as "Maharaj" too. In time, people forgot his original name and he became known as Bhai Maharaj Singh. At the same time through seva and intense meditation on *Naam* he ascended to a very high spiritual level. One could see that his mind was always focussed on Akaal Purakh's Name while his tongue recited Gurbani and hands stayed busy in the preparation of *langar*.

It is quite well known, that everyday about 1500 pilgrims partook food at the langar of Baba Bir Singh Ji. However, because of hard work and vigilance by Bhai Maharaj Singh, there was never a complaint of either quality or quantity of food in the langar. It is difficult to say when he took rest because he was always present in the langar to make sure that every pilgrim was properly served. Around the year he had only a *'kachhehra'* (knee-high breeches), a small turban and a long loose garment (*kafni*) to cover his body. His daily routine was to get up at 1:00 AM. After taking bath, he then prepared warm water for the bath of Baba Bir Singh Ji. After this, he sat in deep meditation for four hours and then entered kitchen to prepare food for the visiting devotees. During morning congregational meetings, he sat outside and cleaned the shoes of the pilgrims. He gradually reduced his intake of food so much that some sevadars went to Baba Bir Singh Ji and complained that if Bhai Maharaj Singh continued with the small amount food that he was taking, he might not live very long. Baba Bir Singh Ji thought of a subtle way of feeding Baba Maharaj Singh. Everyday several devotees used to bring large cups full of sweet curd for him. He would take a spoonful from each cup and give the remaining to the devotee who had brought it. From that day on, he started giving one cup to Bhai Maharaj Singh after taking a spoonful from it. For the first few days, Bhai Maharaj Singh ate the cupful of curd but then he thought that he was being too greedy for not sharing it with other devotees. So he started taking only a spoonful from the left-over curd of Baba Bir Singh Ji and passed the remaining on to other devotees.

When Baba Ji came to know of this he called Bhai Maharaj Singh and said, "According to Gurbani one must take care of one's body - keep it healthy so that one could meditate on *Naam* with full control of one's faculties. This would not be possible if one's body is weak".

ਨਾਨਕ ਸੋ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਸਿਮਰੀਐ ਤਿਸੁ ਦੇਹੀ ਕਉ ਪਾਲਿ॥ (SGGS, p.554)

Bhai Maharaj Singh, without questioning even a single word of his preceptor, bowed his head and started on a reasonable diet from that day onward.

He always remembered the words of Baba Bir Singh Ji: "When a person embarks on a spiritual journey, he would encounter many obstacles. These may be physical in nature, such as an ailment or they could be mental, e.g., lust, anger, greed, worldly attachment and ego. As he successfully crosses these obstacles he starts acquiring occult powers as a result of which many people become his followers. At this stage usually many seekers fail. They get lost in these powers and forget their goal. If some rare one, by the grace of Akaal Purakh does not waver at this stage and continues on his spiritual journey by following the code of conduct delineated by the Gurus, he is sure to achieve the goal of merger into Akaal Purakh". Bhai Maharaj Singh tried to act on these words by spending most of his time in meditation on *Naam* and in discharging his duty in the langar to the best of his ability.

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[2] Please see the chapter on the life history of Baba Bir Singh Ji in this book.

He was the head - sevadar (chief cook) in the langar and had about fifty sevadars working for him. However, he never spoke a single harsh word to anyone nor he exhibited his superior position. Even when someone made a mistake which resulted in a problem in the kitchen, he took the blame on himself by saying that he had failed to give proper directions or it was because of lack of supervision on his part.

One day Bhai Maharaj Singh was sitting in the kitchen in front of a cauldron in which *'daal'* (lintel soup) was being prepared. As usual, his eyes were closed and he was meditating on *Naam*. Suddenly a *sevadar* shouted, "Maharaj Ji! The *daal* has started overflowing the cauldron, it must be stirref immediately". Bhai Maharaj Singh suddenly opened his eyes and looked around for a ladle to stir the *daal* but did not find any. He remembered God, put his arm in the cauldron and started stirring the daal with his hand till the boiling *daal* subsided. The *sevadar* was watching the whole scene from some distance. He ran towards Baba Bir Singh Ji and narrated to him what he had seen. A doctor was sent for immediately, who came to the kitchen and saw that Baba Maharaj Singh was calmly sitting in a meditation pose. On examining his arm the doctor found absolutely no sign of any burn there. He went and told all this to Baba Bir Singh Ji who was sitting in the congregation at that time. Baba Bir Singh called Bhai Maharaj Singh and in the presence of the whole congregation said to him, "You know that according to the teachings of our Gurus (*Gurmat*) playing of miracles is a taboo. Why then you showed this miracle?" Baba Maharaj Singh humbly replied, "Who am I to show any miracle, sir? It is all your kindness and grace of Satguru that my arm came out of boiling daal totally unscathed. All this happened so suddenly that I had no time to think. The only way I could stop the daal from spilling was to stir the pot. I used the only stirring implement that I thought was at my disposal at that time - it happened totally unconsciously. However, if in doing so I violated in any way, any tenet of Sikhism then I humbly apologise and beg to be forgiven". On hearing this Baba Bir Singh Ji was overwhelmed with emotion. He embraced Baba Maharaj Singh and said, "With your sincerity, humility and deep sympathy for humanity you will be able to complete your spiritual journey ahead of many others. Your exemplary devotion to save the *langar* even at the cost of serious harm to your body pleases the Guru and your *seva* has been recorded with acceptance in his court".

Baba Maharaj Singh was not only discharging his duties of incharge of the langar and personal attendant of Sant Baba Bir Singh Ji with great enthusiasm and to the satisfaction of everyone, but also devoting a major portion of his spare time in learning Gurbani meanings and meditation on *Naam*. At the same time he was not totally oblivious of the events occurring at the Lahore Darbar. He had a great sympathy for the Khalsa Raj and it hurt him immensely to see its steep decline soon after the death of Maharajah Ranjit Singh.

The deterioration of conditions culminated in the attack of Khalsa army on the *dera* of a pious Gursikh like Baba Bir Singh who had dedicated his life in the teaching of tenets of Sikhism to the masses and fearlessly given refuge to Sandhawalia Sardars and Jawahar Singh Nalwa, the son of Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa, because to help the helpless is the injunction of Guru Granth Sahib. The martyrdom of Baba Bir Singh and many innocent pilgrims (including the Sandhawalia Sardars and Sardar Jawahar Singh Nalwa) in this attack, deeply hurt Baba Maharaj Singh's feelings[3]. He decided to dedicate his life in trying to save the Lahore Darbar from the dirty tricks of the British Government and its sinister schemes to devour the Khalsa Raj and to restore the prestige of the Lahore Darbar to the same level as it enjoyed during the life of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

After the martyrdom of Baba Bir Singh he became the sole incharge of the Dera as was the last wish of Baba Ji. This added greatly to his prestige and respect among Sikh masses, which he already enjoyed because of his immaculate conduct and selfless service.

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[3] A detailed account of this episode given in the biography of Baba Bir Singh.

He was regularly being appraised of the intrigues going on in Lahore, the infidelity of Dogra brothers and disloyalty of many Sardars to the family of Maharajah Ranjit Singh. He could feel that if the chaotic conditions continued like that, in a short time the Khalsa Raj that was established by Maharajah Ranjit Singh and the Sikh nation by their untiring toil and innumerable sacrifices would be annihilated and the cunning Britishers, possibly with their stooges, the Dogra brothers, would be the masters of Punjab.

He therefore decided to try to wake up the Sikhs by warning them of this clear and approaching danger. But before whole-heartedly embarking on this mission he wanted to hand over the charge of the Dera to someone who could keep up the traditions of Baba Bir Singh Ji. After a careful search among his disciples and senior workers at the Dera he selected junior Baba Bir Singh, a devoted and saintly person who commanded respect among all the workers of the Dera and installed him as the incharge. Now he felt that he could devote all his energy to the cause of the wellbeing of the Sikh nation by cleansing the Lahore Darbar of intrigues and betrayals that had become its hallmark.

He first went to Amritsar to get the blessings of the Guru for his mission and stayed there for a few days. He sent invitations to all the citizens of Amritsar to come to a feast. A very large number of citizens came to attend. Although he did not deliver any *firy* speech in this gathering the spies of Lahore Darbar delivered the news (with exaggerations) indicating that Baba Maharaj Singh had intentions to shake up the government. This news shook up many top government officials in Lahore.

The British resident in Lahore and Heera Singh Dogra, who was the Prime minister at that time, alerted their spies to keep an eye on every movement of Baba Maharaj Singh and report as soon as possible every detail to them. Heera Singh knew that after Baba Bir Singh the Sikh masses in general and Sikh army in particular had deep reverence for Baba Maharaj Singh. Therefore he could prove to be very dangerous if he started preaching against the Darbar.

Sir John Lawrance, the resident in Lahore, wrote a letter on June 1, 1847 to the governor general of India in which he wrote that he had

arrested the assassin Prema[4], according to whom Maharani Jindan had sent a message to Baba Maharaj Singh, requesting him to help assassinate the British Resident and some other officials in the Lahore Darbar.

The Maharani had actually sent a message to Baba Maharaj Singh requesting him to help her to somehow check the onslaught of the British 'plague' and save the *Khalsa Raj* from the claws of foreigners. She was extremely frustrated by the behaviour of the resident who did not let her take any decision even in the day-to-day working of the government.

Although Sir Lawrance did not think that a religious person like Baba Maharaj Singh would become a pawn in the political game of Maharani Jindan; he still did not want to take any chances. Furthermore, he wanted to take advantage of the situation and consolidate his own power.

The followers of Baba Maharaj Singh were planning to somehow take away Prince Dalip Singh out of Lahore, crown him as the Maharajah of the *Khalsa Raj* and then confront the British Government. It seems that this plan somehow got leaked and as a result battalion of soldiers was despatched from Lahore to apprehend Baba Maharaj Singh.

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[4] Prema and his brother Mohra came from Wazirabad. They had been in the employ of Raja Gulab Singh Dogra and were known to be reckless men who loved to undertake dangerous assignments. The Sikh Sardars who wanted to get rid of the British interference, which was becoming more and more suffocating everyday, and was hindering the smooth functioning of the Khalsa Raj, conspired to assassinate Sir Lawrance, the British resident at Lahore and some Sikh Sardars who had become his stooges. They decided to strike when all of them gathered for a meeting in the Shalimar Garden, Lahore. For this task Prema and his brother were selected. This, according to the British spies, was known to Baba Maharaj Singh who, it is said, gave a sword as his blessing to Prema.

According to the Lahore treaty of 1846 the Khalsa Raj was divided into three portions. The state of Jammu and Kashmir was handed over to Raja Gulab Singh Dogra, the area comprising the Jalandhar Doab and Cis-Satluj tract was annexed into the British territory and the third part was being administered by Maharani Jindan as the caretaker of the young Prince Dalip Singh. But this was only on paper. The real power was in the hands of Henry Lawrance who openly issued orders even against the decisions of the Lahore Darbar. Maharani Jindan was sick and tired of his belligerent behaviour and wished to get rid of him.

Unfortunately the plan of this conspiracy was leaked by an associate of Prema, who happened to be a double agent. Consequently, Prema was captured along with his associates a couple of days ahead of the day of the meeting.

The news of this order somehow reached Amritsar before the soldiers could reach there to arrest him. That night Baba Maharaj Singh left Amritsar leaving a fairly larger amount of paraphernalia at the campcite. When the Lahore army reached Amritsar to apprehend Baba Maharaj Singh, he was already gone. The army confiscated all the items left in the camp and auctioned them or gave them away to religious organizations. Baba Maharaj Singh was declared a fugitive, warrants for his arrest were issued and the officer who was deputed to keep an eye on Baba Maharaj Singh was relieved of his duty. Even a thorough search of Amritsar area and adjoining villages did not offer any clue regarding Baba Ji's whereabouts.

The news of arrest warrants of Baba Maharaj Singh spread like wild fire in the whole Majha tract of Punjab and the public was infuriated at this totally unjustifiable act of the Lahore government. This situation scared the British Government who felt that a broad based revolt in Punjab might endanger their freshly enhanced influence over the *Khalsa Raj*. An order was therefore issued, that anyone (an individual, group or even a town) who helps or gives refuge to the fugitive Maharaj Singh shall be severely punished. Diwan Dina Nath, however, opposed this policy. As a result of his efforts, the order was revoked but two particular areas, Lahore and the town of Hudiara, which belonged to Baba Bir Singh's mother's parents, were kept under strict surveillance. The inhabitants of these areas had to undergo extreme hardships but they kept on supplying information and monetary help to Baba Maharaj Singh.

At this time Baba Maharaj Singh got the news that Diwan Mool Raj, the governor of Multan had revolted against the Lahore Darbar (actually the Diwan wanted to remove the yoke of the British Government). He therefore decided to go to Multan and help the Diwan in his mission. The Lahore Darbar despatched an army under the command of Baba Mali Singh to intercept Baba Maharaj Singh before he could join his forces with Diwan Mool Raj and capture him dead or alive. At the same time the Lahore Darbar fired several army officers who were suspected to be the followers of or sympathetic to Baba Maharaj Singh.

At the time that Baba Maharaj Singh was deciding to go to Multan he received a message from Diwan Mool Raj requesting Baba Ji to help him as soon as possible. That he had revolted against the British occupation of the *Khalsa Raj*; therefore he had no intention of fighting the *Khalsa army* that was being despatched against him by the *Lahore Darbar*. He urged Baba Maharaj Singh to use his influence to convince the commanders of the invading army about his (Diwan's) good intentions and thus avoid a catastrophe.

Baba Maharaj Singh knew that Diwan Mool Raj was a devotee of Baba Bir Singh and a loyal servant of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and believed in his good intentions. Therefore, he decided to march towards Multan in a hurry.

In Lahore Maharani Jindan was under virtual house arrest; therefore she could not do anything to avert the order of an additional despatchment of the Khalsa army under the command of Sardar Kahn Singh Majithia to follow Baba Maharaj Singh and surround him before he could reach Multan. She was also aware of the good intentions of Diwan Mool Raj but was totally helpless.

In order to reach Multan from Lahore or any part of Majha area one had to cross the river Chenab and at that time there was only one bridge over this river. Before Baba Maharaj Singh and his army could reach this bridge, the Lahore army under the command of Baba Mali Singh had already occupied it. To make the matters worse, a large army consisting of a battalion of English soldiers and the army of Nawab of Bahawalpur were waiting across the river to engage Baba Maharaj Singh's forces in case he succeeded in overcoming the resistance offered by Baba Mali Singh's army.

Baba Maharaj Singh was not only a very highly spiritual person but also an able military strategist and a farsighted general. When he along with his army, which consisted of several thousands of his devotees, reached the river Chenab, he immediately knew that the Khalsa army, the British regiment and the Muslim forces were planning to surround his army. He ordered a part of his army to plunge into the river to cross it down stream to avoid a battle immediately. To the remaining, he ordered to engage with the army of Baba Mali Singh, cut it and cross the bridge. A fierce battle ensued in which Baba Mali Singh was wounded and his army retreated; thus making it possible for Baba Maharaj Singh's army to cross the bridge.

After crossing the bridge he quickly met with the part of his forces which had already crossed the river, regrouped and then advanced towards Multan. They thus thwarted the plan of the British to engage him into a major battle with the combined forces. A small detachment of four hundred selected soldiers under the command of Captain Cox and some Muslim army followed and caught up with Baba Maharaj Singh's army near Kameela Nagar where a battle ensued. But they could not withstand the charge of brave fighters of Baba Ji's army and had to retreat.

From Kameela Nagar Baba Ji decided to go to Jhang. The English army tried to stop his advance again but failed and after a skirmish Baba Maharaj Singh's army reached Jhang. The government officials and the respectable citizens of Jhang gave a warm welcome to Baba Ji and offered their full cooperation in his worthy cause. They offered twenty thousand rupees and all the rations for the army and also offered the local fort if Baba Ji wanted to start his movement of fight-for-freedom from there. Baba Maharaj Singh profusely thanked them for their love, patriotism and generosity but told them that it was more important for him to go to Multan to help Diwan Mool Raj at that time. He added that if God gave him success in his mission in Multan then he would see to it that the expression of patriotism of the citizens of Jhang was duly recorded in the history with appropriate recognition.

When Baba Ji reached Multan, Diwan Mool Raj came to receive him along with his courtiers and many respectable citizens. He bowed reverently before him, presented him with fiftyone gold coins and many valuable presents and made very good arrangements for a comfortable stay for Baba Maharaj Singh and his close associates. Plenty of rations were provided for the army and every one was satisfied.

Baba Maharaj Singh had realized that in order to defeat the combined forces of the Lahore Darbar (virtually controlled by the Dogras) and the British government it was imperative that Dewan Mool Raj and Raja Sher Singh and his group of Sardars must unite. He therefore talked to Dewan and apprised him of his thoughts on the

situation. At the same time, he contacted Raja Sher Singh, who had great respect for Baba Ji, and tried to convince him that the only way to get rid of Dogra brothers and the Britishers was to join forces with Diwan Mool Raj. As a result of his efforts, he succeeded in bringing the two together. But, unfortunately this compromise did not last very long because Diwan Mool Raj was unable to meet the expenses of the combined armed forces.

In disappointment, Baba Maharaj Singh decided to leave Multan. He indicated to Raja Sher Singh and his associate Sardars including Raja Chatar Singh and Rana Surat Singh Majithia, that he planned to go to Malwa, passing through Mukatsar and Damdama Sahib, would then proceed to Anandpur. From there he would go to Jammu and then to Rawalpindi. Raja Sher Singh and his companions requested that they were planning to engage the British army at Chilianwala, near Gujrat and needed Baba Ji's help to take the responsibility of supplying their army with food and other necessities. To this Baba Maharaj Singh readily agreed because service to the country and people was the foremost object of his life. When the soldiers in the army heard that Baba Ji was to take care of the supplies they were quite satisfied.

In preparation for this battle, Raja Sher Singh and his companion Sardars needed a lot of help not only from the Khalsa army but also the public at large. They also knew that Baba Maharaj Singh enjoyed great respect among the Sikh masses as well the Khalsa army. Therefore they requested Baba Ji to help them in obtaining the support of everyone. Baba Maharaj Singh readily agreed to this worthy cause. A letter was prepared addressing the Sikh masses, which went as follows:

> "On behalf of Baba Maharaj Singh Ji, the undersigned declare that time has arrived when we must get ready to fight the foreign invaders (Britishers) who with great cunning and deception are succeeding to usurp the *Khalsa Raj*. It is therefore the sacred duty of every citizen to join this holy struggle and get ready to sacrifice everything in order to free our motherland[5]".

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[5] Later on, referring to this very letter, in order to convict Baba Maharaj Singh, Lord Dalhousie, the governor general of India wrote, "these battles (Chilianwala and Gujrat) were fought by the Sikhs directly against the English people. The purpose was to destroy the influence of the British from not only Punjab but the entire Indian sub-content".

(The letter was under the signatures of Raja Sher Singh and his companion Sardars)

The response to this letter was overwhelming. Soon Raja Sher Singh had a very large army at his command, ready to have a decisive battle with the British forces. Baba Maharaj Singh made all the arrangements for the supplies for this army and himself left for Rawalpindi.

The Khalsa army, under the command of Raja Sher Singh fought two bloody battles (at Chilianwala and Gujrat). But unfortunately, because of lack of necessary financial sources, some strategic mistakes on the part of Raja Sher Singh and the superior fire power of the British forces, it lost both the battles and with that the courage and conviction to oust the English people from Punjab.

After these defeats, a meeting was held at Rawalpindi in order to make a final decision. The meeting was attended by some generals of the *Khalsa army* and several prominent Sikh Sardars. The final majority decision was to surrender arms and consider the establishment of British rule in Punjab as fate accomplice. At that point Baba Maharaj Singh got up and once again reminded everyone present of the vow that they had taken before starting on the crusade against the British that they would fight till the end to oust the foreigners from their motherland and would never surrender and lay down their arms - would prefer martyrdom to slavery. He then addressed the leading Sardars who were the first in favour of surrender. He said, "You own large estates now which you want to save by surrendering to the British. But let me tell you, even by accepting all the conditions of the British you may not be able to save your estates because you will be on the mercy of the conquerors and will have to accept whatever crumbs they throw towards you. It would be better if you fight and get martyrdom rather than live a wretched life of a slave".

This inspiring speech of Baba Maharaj Singh had a profound effect on the soldiers who offered their full cooperation and said that they were ready to fight to the end. However, most of the Sardars had lost courage and were not ready, under any circumstances, to fight another battle with the British. Only Baba Bikram Singh Bedi of Una and Col. Richhpal Singh Poorbia decided to stay with Baba Ji and fight to the end.

From Rawalpindi Baba Maharaj Singh and Baba Bikram Singh Bedi started for Kashmir. Soon after they had left, the news of their departure leaked out and an English army battalion quickly followed and with lightening speed caught up with them. A battle ensued in which the British succeeded in capturing Baba Bikram Singh Bedi. Baba Maharaj Singh, however, succeeded in escaping with his army and reached Sri Nagar[6].

On reaching Sri Nagar, Baba Maharaj Singh met with Yuvraj Ranbir Singh, the son of Raja Gulab Singh, and got permission from him to purchase provisions for his forces. Having done this he sent his messengers to Majha and Doaba areas in Punjab to meet the Sikh leaders and bring them to his side.

Baba Maharaj Singh was known all over Punjab for his immaculately pious life, great sympathy for *Khalsa Panth* and magnetic personality. Many Sikh army officers had become his devotees. They believed in the cause for which he had put his life in peril, and were ready to follow him and sacrifice their lives for the freedom of their motherland. When the messengers delivered Baba Ji's message to the Sikh masses, the response was overwhelming. A large amount of money was collected and an equally large number of volunteers started to go and join his army.

In the mean time the British had taken full control of the Lahore Darbar and started tightening controls over all the government departments. Urdu and English were declared to be the court languages and the courts were directed to give decisions without any undue delay.

Baba Maharaj Singh opened an army camp at Chhumbh in the Jammu state and established a second camp at Vatala Devi. He then sent a group of warriors (*Jatha*) under the command of Baba Ram Singh, one of his most trusted associates, to Lahore. The plan was to somehow abduct the young Maharaja Dalip Singh and bring him to the hills of Jammu and Kashmir where he was to be formally crowned as the legitimate Maharaja of Punjab. Following this, battles were to be fought in his name to throw the yoke of the British slavery. Baba Ji also wrote to his devotees in Kabul to contact Amir Dost Muhammad, the ruler of

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[6] Baba Bikram Singh Bedi was taken to Amritsar and put in a prison where after a short time he died.

Afghanistan asking him to forget the old differences and join hands with him to defeat their common enemy.

It seems that there were several agents of the British in the camps of Baba Maharaj Singh who were keeping them aware of all his plans. As a result the Jatha sent to Lahore was apprehended. Baba Ram Singh was let go because he was considered a saintly person, above and beyond political intrigues. The remaining members of the Jatha were given severe punishments.

Baba Ram Singh, on leaving Lahore sent a message to Baba Maharaj Singh in which he suggested to him to come to the Doaba tract where he had a very large following. He believed that together they could be more effective in making the public aware of the grave situation in the country and recruit a large number of volunteers. On receiving this message Baba Maharaj Singh left for Doaba.

On reaching Doaba, Baba Maharaj Singh started working towards bringing together the Sikh Sardars who were fighting with each other on petty personal matters. He also contacted the Rajas of Shivalak hills and urged them to work towards unity of Hindus and Sikhs. He visited many Hindu temples and Muslim mosques and appealed everyone to forget the sectarian differences and make a united front to fight the foreign imperial power. His efforts met with some success in bringing unity among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in that area. At this time he also heard from Amir Dost Muhammad Khan of Afghanistan. He assured Baba Ji that he would do everything in his power to annihilate the British influence in his own country; but was unable to render any help because of paucity of funds.

It soon became clear to Baba Maharaj Singh that in order to fight the British army he would need a large quantity of arms and ammunition, to purchase which he did not have any financial sources. He therefore decided to attack the army cantonments at Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur to capture guns and ammunition. He called a meeting to discuss with his associates the day and time for such attacks. In the meeting, someone said that he would take the responsibility to kill the deputy commissioner of Jalandhar. At this point Baba Maharaj Singh said, "As Sikhs of Guru Gobind Singh we are not supposed to harm anyone who is innocent and is not carrying arms to fight us. If someone can capture and bring him to me then I would tell him that we only want to have our country left to us and not forcibly occupied by any foreign power". It was decided that on third of January, 1850, the two cantonments would be attacked.

A lot of ground needed to be prepared before these attacks. For example, volunteers to handle large guns had to be found and recruited. Adequate quantity of rations needed to be procured. Therefore soon after this meeting Baba Maharaj Singh set out to visit the rural areas around Jalandhar to enlist volunteers and collect small weapons. A prearranged meeting was held at village Zahoora in which two Muslim gunners were introduced to him. Having accomplished this he intended to go to Amritsar for pilgrimage before taking the final step of attacking the cantonments.

As he was travelling towards Amritsar, he was staying in villages where he had his devotees who generously donated money and pledged help in the form of volunteers for the oncoming battles of freedom of motherland. At the same time the English spies were keeping a close watch on his movements and waiting for an appropriate time to get him apprehended. Such an opportunity occurred on the evening of December 28, 1849 when Baba Maharaj Singh was resting in a cluster of trees between the villages of Sham Chaurasi and Adampur, about 14 miles from Jalandhar. A Muslim informer came to Mr. Wenistrat, the deputy commissioner of Jalandhar and told him the location where Baba Maharaj Singh was resting along with 20 to 30 of his trusted companions. Within minutes, the deputy commissioner along with twenty cavalry police rushed to capture him. This party was joined with police constables from the police post Adampur. They surrounded the cluster of trees where the spy had informed that Baba Maharaj Singh was resting. Totally contrary to the expectations of Mr. Wenistrat, practically no resistance was offered by the party of Baba Ji and he along with his 21 companions was captured.

Baba Maharaj Singh was brought to Jalandhar and put in the Jail. Mr. Wenistart was amazed at the respect that Baba Ji enjoyed among the Hindu as well as Sikh populace. Even the Sikh sentinels responsible for his sucurity bowed before the cell in which he was kept.

Mr. Wenistrat, the deputy commissioner of Jalandhar, was curious to know how Baba Maharaj Singh was able to command such respect among the Sikh masses. He therefore studied Baba Ji closely while the latter was in the Jalandhar jail. In a letter to the commissioner, he gave the following description of the personality of Baba Ji, on the basis of his observations:

> "Bhai Maharaj Singh is not an ordinary person. He is respected by his country-men as much as the Christians respect Jesus Christ. Thousands of Hindus and Sikhs have witnessed the miracles made by him and believe that he is a Guru incarnated".

After due investigations Mr. McLeod, the commissioner, wrote his report on Baba Maharaj Singh as follows:

> "I am convinced that Bhai Maharaj Singh is a remarkable person. He has all the attributes of a saint. He has unusual self-control and self-confidence. He seems to have the power to foresee the coming events and has the qualities of a great leader whom people would like to obey".

With this report the commissioner expressed his opinion that the presence of such a person in Punjab would be hazardous to peace because everyday thousands of Hindus and Sikhs came to the jail to pay their homage to Bhai Maharaj Singh - someday this could lead to a rebellion.

The British government therefore decided to move Baba Ji out of Punjab as soon as possible. He was first transferred to the Allahabad fort prison and after some time to fort William in Calcutta (Kolkata). Even this did not satisfy the British government. Finally the Governor General issued an order on March 23, 1850 as a result of which he was deported to Singapur where he was to be kept in solitary confinement for the rest of his life.

In Singapur Baba Maharaj Singh was kept in a room on the second floor of the prison. The Governor General of India wrote a special note to the incharge of the Singapur prison:

> "I have been directed to inform you that special vigilance must be exercised regarding Bhai Maharaj Singh. He should be kept under strict observation all the time but no hardship must be meted to him". However, instead of literally following the directions of the Governor General, the confinement of Baba Ji was made in such a way that no one could see him. Even his personal companion and devotee, Kharak Singh, was put in a separate cell so that the two could not see each other. Back home, in Naurangabad no one knew anything about the whereabouts of Baba Maharaj Singh.

Because of staying in a dark and damp place, consuming bad and alien food for several years, and lack of adequate medical aid, Baba Maharaj Singh lost his sight and contracted cancer in mouth. Disregard of his health condition by the prison authorities made the matters worse. For example, for three months he was living on salted lemonade only. Finally, the day came when this selfless and untiring devotee of Guru Gobind Singh and a true patriot, sacrificed himself for his country. The day was July 5, 1856 when he merged into the supreme soul, Akaal Purakh.

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SANT BABA HARNAM SINGH JI OF BHUCHO

Note: Among the biographical sketches of all the Gurmukhs given in this book, the life of Baba Harnam Singh Ji is unique in many ways. He seems to have been sent by Akaal Purakh in this world with an inexhaustible treasure of celestial powers. Not only that but he seems to have also been authorized to use these powers as and when he thought fit. His life is thus a continuous story full of miracles the most important of which is that he produced a disciple like Baba Nand Singh Ji who is known to have treated Guru Granth Sahib like living Guru Nanak.

Many cynics do not believe in miracles and according to them there is no place of miracles in Sikhism. They probably forget the sweet soap nut (*mitha retha*) and the impression of Guru Nanak's palm in the stone at Panja Sahib. If Akaal Purakh wills He can make a miracle through any of His authorized servants. In Gurbani it is said at many places that whatever the true Bhagats of Akaal Purakh wish, happens immediately.

ਜੋ ਜੋ ਕਹੈ ਠਾਕੁਰ ਪਹਿ ਸੇਵਕੁ ਤਤਕਾਲ ਹੋਇ ਆਵੈ ॥ (SGGS, p. 403)

Bhai Boorh Singh and Mata Pradhan Kaur lived comfortably by farming their land in the village Mansoor Wala, district Kapurthala[1]. They had three sons, Bhai Bagga Singh, Bhai Dasaundha Singh and Bhai Nidhan Singh. In 1813 (or 1823)[2] Bibi Pradhan Kaur gave birth to another baby boy who was named, according to the Sikh rite of passage, Nihal Singh.

From the very beginning this boy was quite unlike any other boy of his age. Instead of playing with his playmates he sat quietly alone most of the time and, in spite of repeated efforts, did not talk to any one. As a result people started calling him *"kamla"* or crazy and the members of his own family started calling him *"mastana"* or care-free; which is a polite term for "kamla".

As Nihal Singh grew up his brothers and parents wanted him to help them in farming, but he never accompanied them to the fields. Instead, he went out to wherever it pleased him and for hours sat quietly. Neither scorching sun nor freezing cold nor soaking rain had any effect on him. Even hunger or thirst did not seem to move him from where he was sitting. Sometimes he was noticed to spend the whole night sitting in his bed. Mata Pradhan Kaur was always worried about her youngest son because he never came to her and asked for food or water. She therefore took extra care to give him bath and fed him on time.

Once a roaming ascetic (Sadhu), happened to pass through the village Mansoor Wala. As is the custom of such roaming ascetics, he was begging for food from house to house. When he came to Bhai Boorh Singh's house, the door was open and young Nihal Singh was sitting on a cot in the compound. The sadhu went in and begged for food in a loud voice but did not receive any answer. He then saw young Nihal Singh sitting there. He went closer to the boy and tried to talk to him but again got no answer. For some unknown magnetic attraction the sadhu took the boy's hand and studied the lines on his palm. He then carefully looked at the lines on Nihal Singh's feet for some time. He then bowed before him. In the meantime Mata Pradhan Kaur, who had gone to the neighbour's house, arrived and saw the sadhu touching the feet of her son. She reverently bowed before the sadhu and requested him to sit on the cot so she could serve him food.

As the sadhu sat down to take the food served by Mata Pradhan Kaur he asked her if the young boy was her son. She replied in affirmative and added that he was a strange boy because he neither talked nor played with any one of his playmates. Also he never asked for anything to eat or drink and behaved as if he was totally unaware of his own existence. The sadhu said, "Mother, do not worry about him. You are lucky to have given birth to such a blessed soul. He will be a great person. Let him do whatever pleases him. I feel blessed to have seen him and touched his feet". So saying, the sadhu departed.

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[1] Kapurthala was a state during the British period. After the partition of India it has been made a part of the Punjab state.

[2] The exact year of the birth of the fourth son of Bhai Boorh Singh is not available.

Another time a group of ascetics (sant mandali) came to Mansoor Wala village and stayed there for a few days[3]. Every morning and evening they held congregational gatherings in which after the keertan the leader of the group gave discourses on Gurbani mingled with vedantic quotations and stories from Hindu Puranas. Bhai Boorh Singh regularly went to attend these meetings and took young Nihal Singh with him. The first day he sat in the front row with Nihal Singh sitting in his lap. After the keertan Sant Ji started the Katha (discourse). He noted that the young boy sat throughout the Katha without even moving a limb. After the conclusion Sant Ji went to his room and sent one of his disciples to call Bhai Boorh Singh. When Bhai Boorh Singh (and young Nihal Singh) came, Sant Ji looked at the boy and said, "This is a very unusual young boy. All through the Katha he sat absolutely motionless as if he was absorbing every word that I spoke". Bhai Boorh Singh told Sant Ji that even at home he sat for hours totally oblivious of cold, heat, hunger or thirst. Then Sant Ji said, "You are fortunate to have such a blessed soul in your house. Let him go about the way he wants to. He will be a great person who would emancipate many. I feel fortunate and blessed to have the *'darshan'* (sight) of such a sanctified soul".

When Nihal Singh was ten years old, one day Bhai Boorh Singh said to him, "Take the herd of cows and buffaloes of the family to graze them in the village pasture. There are several boys of your age who daily go with their cattle. You will enjoy their company and do some useful house chore also". Nihal Singh took the herd but on reaching the pasture asked other boys to look after his herd and entered a nearby sugarcane field and sat in meditation. The other boys got busy in playing and no one noticed him. In the evening when the boys started gathering their herds in order to return home they noticed that Nihal Singh was not there. They searched around for a while but did not find him. So they went to the village and informed his parents who got worried and started a search party to find Nihal Singh. The search party looked all over the area of the pasture but did not find him. Finally someone suggested looking into the nearby sugarcane fields where they found Nihal Singh still sitting in meditation. He had not even touched the food that the mother had given him in the morning. After this incident Bhai Boorh Singh gave up on his youngest son and never asked him to do any domestic chore.

Another time young Nihal Singh left home early in the morning and walked a few miles to the river (Beas). He then sat down on the river bank and went into deep meditation. His father and brothers all went to work in the fields and returned only in the evening. On their return they found Mata Pradhan Kaur distraught and crying because Nihal Singh had neither come home for breakfast nor for lunch, and now when the sun was setting still there was no sign of him. Everyone started running around asking one and all if anyone could tell about Nihal Singh's whereabouts. Finally a cowherd told them that he had seen him sitting on the river bank around noon time. On reaching there they found that he was still sitting there oblivious of his surroundings. His elder brother went close to him and shook him up. Only then he opened his eyes. When asked why he had come that far from home, he did not reply. On reaching home the mother fed him with love and affection but the brothers were angry because they did all the work in the fields and Nihal Singh never shared their burden. To make the matters worse they had to go in search of him when they were dead tired after working all day. The parents tried to appease them by telling what the two sants had told about Nihal Singh. This somewhat quietened them down but still they were not completely satisfied.

When Nihal Singh was eleven years of age, one day he said to his mother, "I am going to leave the house - I do not like to live here. Please bid me good bye with a happy heart". The mother said, "Where do you intend to go? You have your parents and brothers here who can take care of you. Away from home you will suffer because no one will know you and therefore take care of you". Nihal Singh said, "I know I will enjoy away from here. Also no one takes care of anyone. Only God takes care of everyone". The mother kept quiet at that time, but when after some time Nihal Singh again said the same words, the mother got alarmed. She told her husband, who in turn asked Nihal Singh if he really was intending to leave home. Nihal Singh answered in affirmative and said, "Everyone comes here alone and goes alone too. So if I leave home alone it is not going to be anything new".

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[3] Those days it was quite common that groups of roaming ascetics went from town to town and stayed for a few days. Some very learned sants also used to be in these groups who gave Vedanta and Gurbani discourses. Many towns had built lodging places (Kutias) for such groups outside of the town. Adequate arrangements were also made for their boarding by the town's people.

One day a lady from neighbourhood who was a very good friend of Mata Pradhan Kaur came to see her. This lady had an infant son whom she brought with her. Mata Pradhan Kaur was busy in household chores at that time. The lady said, "If your son, Nihal Singh, can take care of my son then I will help you in your chores and we can finish them quickly and then sit down and talk". Mata Ji asked Nihal Singh, who was sitting with his eyes closed, to pick up the boy and play with him but Nihal Singh refused. The mother repeated a couple of times that the kid was like his (Nihal Singh's) younger brother and like a good elder brother he should pick him up. Nihal Singh spontaneously said, "Mother, if you insist, God will pick him up. I cannot stop what I am busy doing". As luck would have it the neighbour's boy passed away in a few days. The boy's mother bitterly complained to Mata Pradhan Kaur that it was Nihal Singh's words that cause the boy's death. The mother was very angry at Nihal Singh and stopped talking to him. After a few days Nihal Singh asked his mother the reason for her anger. The mother told him what the neighbour lady had said. Nihal Singh said, "Mother, will you be happy with me if the boy comes back"? The mother said, "How could a dead person come back"? Nihal Singh said, "He who has called him can send him back too. But I request you not to be angry with me". In a year's time the neighbour lady gave birth to a baby boy who looked identical to the boy who had died a year earlier. When the mother told this to Nihal Singh he said, "Mother, are you happy now"? When the mother answered in affirmative Nihal Singh said, "If you are happy then give me permission so I could leave now". When the mother asked where he intended to go; Nihal Singh replied, "Wherever God wants me to go".

A few miles from the village there was a thick cluster of trees. No one dared enter it because of the legend that a huge python that had the magic power of changing its form at will lived there[4]. One day Bhai Nihal Singh went inside this thicket and was so much enamoured of the luxuriance and solitude of the place that he started spending his day time there. One day someone saw him entering this cluster. He went and told Bhai Boorh Singh. The next morning when Bhai Nihal Singh was ready to leave home the father asked him, "Where have you been going for the past few days"? When Nihal Singh kept quiet, the father said, "We have been told that you have been spending your day time in that dreadful forest. I do not want you to go there any more". Nihal Singh did not answer and again left for his favourite place. When he returned in the evening his mother said, "Are you not afraid of staying in the abode of the fearful snake? We are all worried to death for your safety". Nihal Singh said, "Mother, do not worry about me. God is my saviour and He always worries about my safety".

The next morning when he was ready to leave, the mother stopped him and said, "Have some milk before you go". Nihal Singh took the glass of milk, drank it and then said, "Can I go now"? The mother gave him a sheet and said, "Use this sheet to sit on because the soil in that forest is moist and you could get sick". Nihal Singh took the sheet and again said, "Mother, can I go now"? On her answer in affirmative, Nihal Singh left the house not to return for over twelve years.

After leaving home Bhai Nihal Singh embarked on a journey that involved moving from place to place, not staying at any one place for more that a couple of days. Some celestial force was guiding him where he should go. During this continuous journey he met a holy man named Sant Ram Singh who happened to be a very learned person - famous for his deep knowledge of Sanskrit, Vedanta and Yoga Shastra. He belonged to Nirmala sect and was the disciple of Sant Seva Singh who had taken "Khande di Pauhul" from Guru Gobind Singh Ji and served him for 36 years.

Bhai Nihal Singh became a disciple of Sant Ram Singh who first taught him Gurbani and its meanings and then Sanskrit grammar and Vedantic philosophy. Bhai Nihal Singh had a very sharp intellect and an amazing hunger to learn. Soon he mastered the Sikh philosophy as well as Vedanta.

One day Bhai Nihal Singh requested Sant Ram Singh to teach him how to meditate. Sant Ji replied, "You should recite Japu Ji with single minded focus on its meanings; because Japu Ji is the essence of Guru Nanak's philosophy". Bhai Nihal Singh asked, "How many times should I recite Japu Ji daily"? Sant Ji said, "As you start reciting you will yourself realize how many times you should do it". From that day Bhai Nihal Singh started reciting Japu Ji and was soon reciting it 101 times every day. One day when Sant Ram Singh asked how far he had gone; Bhai Nihal Singh told that he was reciting Japu Ji 101 times daily. Sant Ji smiled and said, "It is a good beginning, but you are still aware of the number. You should progress to where the count should cease". From that day on Bhai Nihal Singh started non-stop recitation of Japu Ji - all day and most of the night, sleeping very little. Sant Ram Singh was amazed to see the dedication of his disciple.

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[4] The legend of such snakes known as "ichhadhari" is quite prevalent among village folks of Punjab.

Once Sant Ram Singh got up after midnight and went to where Bhai Nihal Singh slept. He was surprised to see that Nihal Singh was sitting in meditative position. On getting closer he saw a celestial glow on the face of his disciple. Seeing this, Sant Ji returned to his room. When next morning Bhai Nihal Singh came to see him, Sant Ji respectfully asked him to come and sit next to him. Bhai Nihal Singh said, "Sir, you are my teacher, how could I sit at the same level next to you"? Sant Ji said, "As your teacher I insist that you sit next to me". Then he said, "From today on your name is Harnam Singh[5] and not Nihal Singh. Also now I request you to leave this place and either move independently or go to my teacher, Sant Baba Mall Singh at the village Pindori Nijharan. I am convinced that you have gone past the stage where you needed my help or instructions". Bhai Nihal Singh (now Sant Harnam Singh) said, "Your word is my command sir. I will go to Sant Baba Mall Singh Ji". Sant Ram Singh then gave a letter for his teacher and Sant Harnam Singh left for Pindori Nijharan.

Sant Baba Mall Singh's Dera was at a short distance from the village Pindori Nijharan. Many disciples used to come there to learn Gurbani. Sant Harnam Singh, on reaching the Dera went to Baba Mall Singh and after obeisance presented the letter of his teacher. Baba Ji, after reading the letter gave a separate room to Sant Harnam Singh. All the students at the Dera were surprised at the preferential treatment that this new student received. They were further amazed to notice that this new student neither talked nor tried to befriend anyone - he always kept to himself and spent most of his time in his own room. He ate very little

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[5] Harnam literally means God's Name.

and that too only once a day. Even when in the langar, he sat apart from all other students.

One day Baba Mall Singh called his students and asked them about the new disciple. They said, "He stays in his room most of the time, comes to the langar only once a day, eats very little food and does not talk to anyone". The cook also told that he ate very little and never demanded anything else from the langar. Baba Ji kept quiet at that time but after a few days went to Sant Harnam Singh's room and asked him if every thing at the Dera was to his satisfaction. To this Sant Harnam Singh answered in affirmative and Baba Ji left.

One day a sevadar came to Baba Mall Singh and told that the new disciple had not come out of his room for four days; the room was bolted from inside and in spite of knocking there was no answer. Baba Ji went and knocked at the door. When there was no answer he got the door opened by force. On entering the room he saw that Sant Harnam Singh was sitting in deep meditation. He went back without disturbing him and told everyone not to go near that room; but inform him when Sant Harnam Singh came out of the room. That evening when Sant Ji came out of his room, Baba Ji was informed accordingly. He came and met Sant Ji, asked him to drink some milk and then go for a walk. Sant Harnam Singh did as he was told.

After some time, one day Baba Mall Singh called Sant Harnam Singh and initiated a dialogue on various aspects of Gurbani. Baba Ji was a very learned person. He asked some very difficult questions on Gurmat philosophy to which Sant Harnam Singh gave appropriate answers. He then asked what daily prayers Sant Harnam Singh recited? Sant Ji told him that he recited Japu Ji and the Mool Mantra (the passage before the start of Japu Ji - Ik Oankar through Hosi Bhee Sach). Baba Ji was pleased to hear this. He said, "You are a blessed soul. Akaal Purakh is showering His grace on you. You deserve our respect". Sant Ji said, "You are my grand-teacher and I have great reverence for you". Then Baba Ji asked if Sant Ji had any desire. To this Sant Ji replied, "While studying Gurbani from Sant Ram Singh Ji, one day a Kabir's Hymn was being discussed in which he has described the story of Bhagat Prahlad who was saved by God Himself by assuming the form of Narsingh. At that time the desire of having the vision of Narsingh occurred to me. I asked Sant Ram Singh Ji if it was possible to have the *'darshan'* of Narsingh. He answered that anything was possible if one had true devotion and Bhakti. Baba Mall Singh then said, "Narsingh is the most horrifying form God has ever taken and one has to go through some very difficult tests, even at the peril of one's life to qualify for the *'darshan'* of that form. If you are really serious, here is a Mantra called *'Narsingh Kawach'*. You should recite it five times daily. Sant Harnam Singh smiled and said, "Guru Nanak is my ultimate goal but I still want to have the *darshan* of Narsingh".

A few days after this conversation, Baba Mall Singh happened to go to Sant Harnam Singh's room. On opening the door he saw Sant Ji in deep meditation. Baba Mall Singh was amazed to feel as if he was looking at Narsingh's form sitting there. He called Sant Ji and said, "Holy man! You have transformed yourself into Narsingh - I have seen it with my own eyes". Sant Ji opened his eyes and said, "I have absolutely no idea what happened and how it happened". Baba Ji said, "Now you are Baba Maha Harnam Singh. That day is not far away when you will be able to have the actual *'darshan'* of Narsingh". He then added, "I now request you to proceed independently wherever you wish. I am afraid some of the sevadars here may not say or do something disrespectful to you for which, I would have to be held responsible". The same day Sant Harnam Singh left for Amritsar.

At Amritsar, Sant Harnam Singh's daily routine was as follows: He took bath in the Sarovar (the lake at Golden Temple) soon after midnight and then sat down somewhere in the 'Parikarma' in deep meditation. At about 3:00 AM when devotees started coming to Harimandir Sahib, he got up and went out of the city in the woods where he spent all day reciting Japu Ji. In the evening he returned, had one 'roti' from the langar of Sant Mastan Singh and came back to the 'Parikarma' again where he sat in meditation. This way he passed 8 - 10 years. During this period he recited Japu Ji and the Mool Mantra hundreds of thousands of times.

One day while he was sitting in meditation in the woods, it occurred to him that still he had not had the *'Darshan'* of Narsingh. Suddenly he heard a voice saying, "If you want to see me then you have to provide me my food". In utter surprise he looked around but did not see anyone. So he said aloud, "What food would you like to have"? Again the voice said, "I need ten grams of Arsenic (oxide)". Next morning Sant Ji went to the

shopkeeper who had become his devotee and often gave him milk and asked him to bring ten grams of Arsenic Oxide. The devotee brought the Arsenic which Sant Ji ground, made into a small packet, put it in his pocket and started towards Jalandhar. On reaching in the outskirts of the city he stopped at a shop and asked for some milk. The shopkeeper gave him some milk. To this Sant Ji added the Arsenic, drank and started walking again. It was evening when he reached outside a village where there was a large pond. Feeling very weak he sat down there. After some time he started vomiting and also having motions. At the same time his body temperature started rising. He started reciting Japu Ji as he was losing consciousness. Early in the morning he heard a sound like an explosion accompanied by blinding light and then saw Narsingh in the middle of the light. At the same time a voice three times repeated that sounded like: "In Kalyug, Nanak is the emancipator", and Narsingh vanished and in his place Guru Nanak appeared.

In the morning a villager saw Sant Harnam Singh lying there. At first he thought him to be dead. He brought some more villagers who, found that he was still alive but was breathing very weakly. In the mean time Sant Ji opened his eyes and on asking told that his village was Mansoor Wala. One of the villagers suddenly recognized him because he knew Sant Ji's family and remembered that 12 years back the young boy known as "Mastana" had left home and could not be found in spite of all efforts of the family members and friends. He brought some milk and gave it to Sant Ji, which he drank. But he was too weak to stand up and walk. This friend then arranged to have Sant Ji transported to his family. Mata Pradhan Kaur who because of passing away of her husband, was already in a state of utter grief, was overwhelmed with emotions on seeing her lost son returning in such a precarious condition.

The mother started nursing her son with tender love and care. She contacted all the 'vaids' and 'hakeems' (doctors of indigenous medicine) of the area and gave whatever medicines (herbal preparations) they prescribed but there was no improvement in his condition - he could not stand up (or walk) and kept lying in bed. At that time Sant Harnam Singh was 26 years of age. One day when the mother was going somewhere for an urgent chore, before leaving she told her eldest daughter-in-law to take care of Sant Ji. After some time Sant Ji had an urge to go to the bath room. He called for someone to come and help him. The sister-in-law instead of helping started taunting that he was a good-for-nothing lazy bum who had come back to bum the meals and had become a burden onto the family. At that time Sant Ji prayed to Akaal Purakh to help him become self sufficient. Then he stretched his body with all the strength he could muster. Suddenly all his joints that were totally jammed for several months, opened up and he stood up. On returning the mother had a pleasant surprise to see that her son could walk without anyone's help. When she asked how this had happened, Sant Ji said, "He who tied the knots has untied them today". After staying home for another few days he told his mother that he wanted to leave. The mother was reluctant to give permission because he was still too weak to walk more than a few steps at a time. But when Sant Ji told the story of his sister-in-law, she reluctantly agreed. She gave him some new clothes, sheets and some butter and arranged with someone to carry him some distance as he wished.

For a few days he walked short distances to various villages where he begged for enough food to sustain himself and spent most of his time in meditation outside in the fields. He then decided to go to Anandpur and started walking in that direction. He was still so weak that he could walk very slowly and that too for a very short distance after which he had to rest for some time. A farmer on a bullock cart was passing by. He saw this holy man staggering after walking for only a few steps. He offered him a ride up to Kapurthala, where he was going. Sant Ji accepted the ride and sat down in the cart. The farmer told Sant Ji that he was going to the court to hear the verdict, by the magistrate of Kapurthala, of a law suit against him.

In the evening the farmer stopped a few miles outside Kapurthala and cooked some food. He gave some to Sant Ji who accepted it but did not eat at that time and tied it in his scarf. The farmer then gave his cot to Sant Ji to sleep comfortably and he himself slept on the ground. Early in the morning one of the bullocks started producing strange sounds. The farmer got up and on seeing the condition of the bullock started crying. Sant Ji who was sitting in meditation opened his eyes and asked the farmer the reason for his crying. The farmer told that the bullock was having serious problem in the stomach and could even die in a short time. Sant Ji untied the food from his scarf and said, "Give this food to the bullock; God will help". The farmer obeyed the command of this holy man and gave the food to the bullock which ate it avidly. Within a few minutes the bullock stood up. The farmer was amazed. He touched Sant Ji's feet and profusely thanked him for saving the life of his bullock, thus averting a financial catastrophe to befall on him, the poor farmer, who was already in great trouble because some rich farmers of his village had filed a law suit against him as a result of which he had to take several trips to Kapurthala courts. When Sant Ji enquired further the farmer said, "Today I am going to hear the magistrate's verdict in the case against me. I know that the verdict is going to be against me because the plaintiff has approach with the authorities. I do not know how I am going to pay the fine and or stay in the prison". Sant Ji said, "Have faith in Akaal Purakh. You are a kind-hearted person therefore He will help you. I guarantee that the verdict today will be in your favour". The farmer half-heartedly said, "Sant Ji, I hope Akaal Purakh listens to your words". Then they started for the Kapurthala courts. Sant Ji stayed with the cart while the farmer went to the court. After some time he came back jumping in happiness. He said to Sant Ji, "By some miracle played by you I have won the case". Sant Ji smiled and said, "It is by the grace of Akaal Purakh. Now I must leave. But before I go, listen carefully to what I am going to say:

1. Do not try to usurp what belongs to someone else.
2. Try to spend as much time as you can to remember God.
3. According to your means try to help those who are really needy and those 'sants' who depend only on God for their daily needs. Then Sant Ji departed for Anandpur.

Walking slowly he reached in the forest outside the town of Una (now in Himachal Pradesh). He was sitting in meditation when a shepherd passed by. The shepherd bowed before Sant Ji and said, "If and when you need some food, you should go to Una where you could eat in the Langar of Bedi Sahib[6]". Sant Ji said, "I am fine here; you need not worry for me. Just take care of your herd". The shepherd left but when he returned in the evening he saw that Sant Ji was still sitting at the same spot. He again went near him, bowed and said, "Looks like you did not go to the town and probably have not had anything to eat". Sant Ji answered in affirmative. The shepherd said, "May I bring one of my own goats so you could take its milk"? Sant Ji gave permission and the shepherd brought a goat whom Sant Ji milked and drank the milk. The shepherd went home and started milking his goats. He was surprised to find that the goat which Sant Ji had already milked gave the usual amount of milk again. The next morning he eagerly went to where Sant Ji sat the previous day but was disappointed to find that Sant Ji had gone.

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[6] The Bedis of Una are direct descendents of Guru Nanak Dev Ji.

After a few days the shepherd saw Sant Ji again and offered his goat's milk which he accepted and drank. The shepherd then requested Sant Ji to pray for him to Allah. Sant Ji smiled and taught the shepherd how to contemplate on Allah. For some more time Sant Ji stayed in that area. He also came across Bedi Sahib who was on a hunting expedition. After exchange of pleasantries Bedi Sahib invited Sant Ji to Una, but did not get any response. After a few days Sant Ji went in the outskirts of Una. Someone saw him and informed Bedi Sahib that a sant with his face covered with a white scarf was sitting out side the town. He did not seem to have had any food for a day because he had not gone inside the town to beg for food. Bedi Sahib took some food and went to where Sant Ji was sitting. After respectfully greeting, Bedi Sahib placed the food before Sant Ji who took a small portion out of it and ate. Bedi Sahib then requested Sant Ji to come and stay with him permanently. But Sant Ji declined and said, "I am looking for a place that is far off from any town or village where water is available - a place of perfect solitude". Bedi Sahib, who knew the area very well because of his frequent hunting expeditions, said, "I know of such a place; but one has to walk for several days to reach there". After receiving directions to reach there Sant Ji immediately left to find it.

After walking for a week he finally reached the place described by Bedi Sahib. It was a small valley full of thick cluster of trees. A small stream was flowing and not a soul was visible for miles and miles. Sant Harnam Singh Ji spent five years there and did not come across a single human being. During this period he ate whatever little was available in the form of roots, leaves and fruits from the bushes and trees. Sometime for weeks together he stayed in deep meditation without taking any food.

After five years of intense meditation Sant Harnam Singh Ji left this place and went to Hardwar and on to Badrinath and Hemkunt. Deep in these mountains of Himalayas he met with some ascetics who through control of breath had prolonged their lives and who could stop breathing at will for extended periods. After thus spending some time in the Himalayas he returned to the plains of Punjab and visited his village on an urging from an inner voice. When he reached home his mother was sick. He went and stood by the side of her bed. Someone said into her ear that her son, the 'Mastana' had come. She opened her eyes, looked at him and breathed her last. Sant Ji bowed and immediately left the village.

Now he started roaming from village to village again. One day he stopped near the Dera of a Muslim Pir who was famous for his occult powers. He was a very narrow minded bigot who considered non-Muslims as infidels. Several Hindus visited him in order to get their worldly desires fulfilled. He helped them on the condition that they would get converted to Islam. A disciple of the Pir saw Sant Ji sitting in meditation near the Pir's 'Dargah'. He came and warned Sant Ji that his master did not like any non-Muslim ascetics near his center. It would therefore be better if Sant Ji left immediately. Sant Ji said, "I want to see your Pir and will not leave until I meet with him". The disciple went and told this to his master who was very angry that an infidel was not afraid of his occult powers. He asked one of his senior disciples to go and warn this 'infidel ascetic' that if he does not leave the place till tomorrow, he would be responsible for dire consequences for himself. The disciple conveyed the message to Sant Ji who said, "Your Pir will be compelled to see me tonight. Go and tell him so".

The same evening the Pir started having a severe pain in his stomach which, after some time became intolerable. The Pir realized that it was the doing of the Sant. He therefore sent one of his disciples to bring Sant Ji respectfully to his room. Sant Ji on arrival touched the Pir's stomach with his staff. Suddenly the pain vanished. The Pir touched Sant Ji's feet and begged for his forgiveness. Sant Ji advised him that if God had given him some powers he should use them for the benefit of people and not compel them to convert to Islam. Sant Ji then gave the Pir a book containing the morning Sikh prayers (Japu Ji and others) and left.

For some time Baba Harnam Singh Ji travelled from place to place without stopping for too long at any one place. Then he reached Jagraon where a famous faqir, Lappe Shah, used to live. He was famous for his occult powers and commanded great respect in the area. On meeting him the Pir asked Baba Ji if he could be of any service to him. In reply Baba Ji asked for some groceries which the Pir immediately supplied. Baba Ji cooked the food and after he had finished eating the two got into spiritual discussions. The Pir was highly impressed with the spiritual level of Baba Ji and requested him to stay there for some time. Baba Ji said, "The time for my staying has not yet come, but one of my own[7] will come and establish his Dera here. He will be the saviour of Jagraon". Baba Ji also recited Japu Ji to the Pir who liked it so much that he learned it by heart. Baba Ji then left Jagraon.

In the town of Hathoor two Muslim ascetics who were brothers also had their Dera. Both of them possessed occult powers. One of them was humble but the other had a lot of ego of his powers. When Baba Ji went there and met them the humble one respectfully welcomed him but the egoist, who was power intoxicated, wanted to test how much power Baba Ji possessed. He asked Baba Ji in a sarcastic tone (using the language of ascetics) if he had achieved any thing or wasted his time following the path laid down by a wrong preceptor. If so would he like to have a perfect master? Baba Ji took it as an aspersion on Guru Nanak. He said in a similar symbolic language, "There are numerous boasters like you roaming around; but I have never paid attention to any one". The Pir got angry and said, "Why do you keep your face covered; are you afraid"? Baba Ji said, "We are both Akaal Purakh's humble servants and have no reason to quarrel. So let us not stretch this argument". But the Pir took this answer to be Baba Ji's weakness. He said in a more sarcastic tone, "So you are afraid of showing your face lest I throw a curse on it". Baba Ji said, "You are playing with fire and could get burnt. Now get ready". So saying, he uncovered his face. The Pir suddenly fell down on the ground unconscious. His brother came running and requested Baba Ji to have mercy on him. Baba Ji said, "Sprinkle some water on his face". On sprinkling water the Pir came to his senses. He got up, touched Baba Ji's feet and begged to be forgiven for his behaviour. Baba Ji said, "An ascetic's occult powers should be used only for the service of mankind and not to satisfy his ego". He then left Hathoor.

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[7] He was referring to Baba Nand Singh Ji who came to this area and established his 'Thaath'.

From Hathoor Baba Harnam Singh Ji went to the river Satluj where a Muslim was grazing his water buffaloes. On seeing this saintly person he expressed his desire to Baba Ji of serving milk to him. Baba Ji, seeing his genuine devotion accepted his offer and drank the milk that he served. Baba Ji stayed there for forty days and he herder brought milk everyday. After forty days when Baba Ji was ready to depart he said to the herder, "Now I am leaving. If you have any wish, let me know. I will request Guru Nanak to fulfil it". The herder said hesitatingly, "Sir, I am now in the autumn of my life; but I do not have a son". Baba Ji after a few minutes of silence said, "You will have twin sons. Name them Allah Ditta and Allah Rakha. Both of them will be kind and good persons and bring name to your family. You must always remember Allah and be thankful to Him for all He has already given to you and is going to give you in the future". Baba Ji then departed from there. (Within a year the herder had twin sons).

After roaming around for some time Baba Harnam Singh Ji went towards Barnala. In the jungle outside this town he saw that a woman was collecting firewood and at the same time she was crying. Baba Ji asked her the reason for crying. She said, "I am a poor widow with a four years old son who has been sick for some time. I have spent all I had on his treatment. But his condition has been worsening. Now I have lost all hope. He could die any time leaving me penniless and without any purpose to live for". Baba Ji said, "Bring your son to me. I will pray for his health". The woman brought her son, who looked like a bunch of bones, and laid him in front of Baba Ji. Baba Ji covered him with a small sheet and said to the woman, "I will cure the boy on one condition. You must give him to me". The woman agreed and left for collecting firewood. When she returned after a few hours, Baba Ji asked her to remove the sheet that was covering the boy. When she removed the sheet she was amazed to see the boy healthy as if he had never been sick. Baba Ji then gave the boy a new and unusual name (chilli eater) and said to the woman, "Take him with you and bring him up but remember that from today he belongs to me. He will be a holy man. Let him do whatever he wants to do and live the way he wants to live".

Whenever he was travelling from town to town, he begged for food only once a day and that too from only one home. If he got the food (whether raw provisions or cooked food) he ate it (after cooking if it was raw); but if he did not get any response from the first house, he went back in the wilderness, drank water and spent the next 24 hours in meditation.

On one such day when he knocked at the door of a farmer's house, he saw that the farmer was trying to milk his buffalo. He had tied the hind legs of the animal with a rope but the buffalo would not let him touch its udder. The farmer's wife came to answer at the door and saw a holy man standing there. Baba Ji asked her for some milk. She said, "Sorry, we have no milk. My husband is trying to milk the buffalo but it is stubbornly resisting and not giving any milk". Baba Ji said, "Let me try to milk the buffalo". The farmer's wife said, "If you succeed in milking it then you will be given as much milk as you like". On Baba Ji's urging the farmer untied the rope from around the buffalo's legs and sat down to milk it after Baba Ji touched the animal with his hand. The buffalo stood quietly and let the farmer milk it. To the amazement of the farmer and his wife the amount of milk it gave was much more than his expectation. Baba Ji drank all the milk he wanted to and, before leaving, advised the farmer to recite Gurbani and live an honest life of a Gursikh. God and Gurus would then shower blessings on his home.

One day Baba Ji was meditating in a jungle when a group of roaming ascetics stopped nearby. In the evening they prepared food and were ready to eat when the leader of the group saw Baba Ji and sent one of his disciples to bring him so he could share the food with them. The disciple came to Baba Ji and said, "Sant Ji, food is ready, please come and share it with us". Baba Ji did not answer, therefore the disciple went back and told his guru that the holy man was in deep meditation and would not answer his calls. The guru sent another disciple who also came back with the same answer. The guru was very impressed with Baba Ji's focused meditation. He waited till late next day when Baba Ji opened his eyes. He came along with a couple of his leading disciples and bowed before Baba Ji. However, the disciples accompanying him were very proud of their knowledge of Hindu scriptures. They started asking some difficult questions. Baba Ji gave such convincing answers that they were

completely satisfied. Baba Ji also admonished them in a very subtle way that ego was a malady that kept one away from Akaal Purakh.

One day Baba Ji was passing near a village when he heard a farmer singing 'Heer' (a Punjab folklore), while he was ploughing his field. Baba Ji went near him and asked him to repeat what he was singing. The farmer did so not once but several times as Baba Ji kept on asking him to do so. The farmer asked Baba Ji why did he like 'Heer' so much? Baba Ji said, "Heer was truly in love with Ranjha. I am also in love with my lover, Akaal Purakh". Then he said to the farmer, "Hurry and go home because your wife is ready to give birth". The farmer was surprised how Baba Ji knew this. But he nevertheless hurriedly went home and saw that his wife was indeed in labour. He immediately called the midwife who after examining his wife told that the baby's position in the womb was precarious and there could be danger to its life. The farmer ran back to Baba Ji and told him of the situation. Baba Ji said, "Do not worry. By the time you go home the baby will already be born". The farmer went home and was told by the midwife that by some miracle the position of the baby suddenly changed and after that the delivery was quite normal. The farmer went back to Baba Ji and prostrated before him. Then he requested Baba Ji to stay there for some time. To this Baba Ji agreed. The farmer built a hut in one of his fields where Baba Ji stayed for a few weeks.

One day the farmer was digging in his backyard to construct a small tank to water his buffaloes. He had hardly dug a couple of feet when he found a sealed vessel. On opening he found it to be full of silver coins. He was very happy for suddenly becoming wealthy. That day, as usual, he took milk and bread to Baba Ji. While eating the bread Baba Ji said, "Name your son "Bhag Singh" because it is his fortune that has brought wealth in your house". The farmer was amazed to hear these words of Baba Ji. He was convinced that Baba Ji knew of the sudden wealth that he had found.

The same day Baba Ji left and went to a small forest in the middle of which was a pond that filled with water during the rainy season. This place was at quite a distance from any village and one seldom came across a passerby. Baba Ji liked this place and stayed there for one year spending most of his time in intense meditation. Once a week he went to a village and brought whatever food he obtained from the very first house he begged from and used it for the whole week. Sometimes he had only one crumb of bread a day. After this period of intense meditation he went to the village 'Sarin Wala'. At that time he always kept his face covered and seldom talked to anyone. The villagers constructed a small hut and Baba Ji stayed there for some time.

One day a few young boys came to the threshing arena that was in front of Baba Ji's hut. When they saw an ascetic sitting there with his face covered, they approached closer and asked Baba Ji why he was keeping his face covered in such a hot weather? Baba Ji did not answer. When the boys insisted, Baba Ji said, "The time to uncover has not yet arrived". One of the naughty boys got up and forcibly removed the cloth and uncovered Baba Ji's face. Immediately the threshing arena caught fire. The boys ran and told the villagers who came running and begged for Baba Ji's forgiveness. Baba Ji kept quiet but within minutes a dark cloud came with a dust storm and it started raining. The fire was extinguished but Baba Ji vanished in the dust storm and in spite of extensive search the villagers could not find him.

Once Baba Ji went to the village Jandan Wala, in the state of Jind, sat down under a Peepal tree outside the village and went into deep meditation. After a couple of days a farmer named Mahla Singh passed by. On seeing a Sant sitting in meditation he came near, bowed before Baba Ji and sat down. After some time when Baba Ji opened his eyes, Mahla Singh said, "Sant Ji, please allow me to do any service for you". Baba Ji said, "If you own any cows or buffaloes, you can bring some milk for me". Mahla Singh immediately went home and brought a large vessel full of milk. He was surprised to see that Baba Ji consumed all of it. From that day on Mahla Singh started bringing milk every morning. He was, however, surprised to see that Baba Ji always sat in meditation at the same spot even when the shadow of the tree moved and he was exposed to the scorching heat of the Sun. One day he took courage and asked, "Baba Ji, how can you sit so long in such intense heat"? Baba Ji said, "When you come tomorrow I will answer your question". The next morning when Mahla Singh brought milk, Baba said, "Mahla Singh, "Sit down over there, close your eyes and start reciting Waheguru". Mahla Singh sat down, closed his eyes and started reciting Waheguru. Suddenly

he felt someone holding him by the shoulder and saying, "Open your eyes, Mahla Singh". When he opened his eyes he saw Baba Ji standing in front of him. But he was amazed to see that the Sun was setting. He could not comprehend how the whole day had passed; how he had kept sitting in the Sun and not felt the heat. Baba Ji then said, "Single-minded focusing on a shabad has great power. One forgets completely one's body and its comforts. I have given you this ability of focusing. Now you should go home and practice this meditation. You will be emancipated". He further added, "You have a desire for a son and you will have two. Name them Bachan Singh and Ratan Singh. They will be devoted Gursikhs and bring you peace of mind".

Baba Ji then went to the village Sema where a farmer, Thakra Singh and his wife were passing their time peacefully. Both were devoted Gursikhs and were always ready to enthusiastically serve any Sant who passed through the village. Fortune smiled on them and Baba Ji came to their house. The couple welcomed Baba Ji and served him with such devotion and humility that he stayed with them for two years. However, Baba Ji laid down certain conditions for his stay:

1. No one else in the village should know that Baba Ji was staying there.
2. A separate room should be given to him. If they (Mr. and Mrs. Thakra Singh) wanted to see him, they should come to the door of the room and say aloud, "Dhan Guru Nanak". Then come in only if Baba Ji answered, otherwise turn away.
3. Bring only a cup of milk or one roti (bread) to Baba Ji, prepared in a certain way and that too if Baba Ji asked for (sometimes it happened after several days).

While staying there Baba Ji usually went out early in the morning and returned late in the evening. He rarely spoke and that too a few words of advice to the couple. During this period Thakra Singh and his wife witnessed many hard-to-believe events or miracles. Sometimes they saw Baba Ji continuously sitting in meditation for several days.

Sant Bahal Das was the first personal attendant and disciple of Baba Harnam Singh Ji. While only nine years of age his parents sent him to Doombwali village to serve at the Dera of Udasi Sants. His family who were the devotees of these Udasi Sants believed that Bahal Das was born because of Blessings of the leader of the Dera. Also the name Bahal Das was given by the incharge Sant of the Dera to the baby when he was born. After coming to the Dera Bahal Das served a couple of groups of ascetics for over a decade when he met Baba Harnam Singh Ji. He soon realized that Baba Ji was quite different from the ascetics with whom he had spent so much time. He saw many miracles played by Baba Ji. Some of them are given below. The first one is described as told by Sant Bahal Das himself:

> "Baba Ji was staying outside the village Sema and I used to daily bring milk for him from the village. One day I brought the milk and as usual placed it in front of him and sat down behind him. After some time Baba Ji opened his eyes and said, "Behind that tree a faqir is sitting. Go and bring him here". I went and brought the faqir who respectfully bowed before Baba Ji and sat down. Baba Ji said, "Tell me about yourself and your problem". The faqir said, "I am coming from Ajmer Sharif. My Pir there had given me a 'mantra' to meditate on for forty days and repeat five such cycles. I had completed only two cycles when my Pir died. Since then I started having obstacles in my routine of meditation. Now I am roaming around in search of someone who could help me complete my meditation so that I get liberated". Baba Ji said, "Use the same mantra and have full faith in your Pir. Consider him alive and always there to help you and complete one more cycle of meditation. God will be graceful on you". The faqir followed Baba Ji's instructions and started his meditation. After forty days he came back and said, "I am grateful to you sir, because you have reaffirmed my faith in my Pir. I have achieved, thanks to you, whatever I was searching for".

One day a Sikh came to Baba Ji and started crying. On Baba Ji's asking he told his woeful story. He said, "Sometime back I went to Multan where some friends told me to visit a famous Muslim mystic who was famous for his occult powers. I went to this faqir and asked him if there was any service for me. He told me to bring some tobacco for his hooka. I told him that I was a Sikh and touching tobacco was a taboo for me. I will give money to one of your disciples who should bring the tobacco. At that the faqir got incensed and said, "Snake is not going to bite you if you

touch tobacco". Since then a snake bites me every year. Kindly have this curse removed and save me from annual stress and pain of snakebite". Baba Ji said, "It is good that you stayed steadfast in your devotion to the Guru and not touched tobacco". He then asked Bahal Das to give the Sikh some water to drink. After he drank the water, Baba Ji said, "Now you go home and recite the Mool Mantra whenever you find time. Also keep a brick in your house and hit it with your shoe everyday". The Sikh did as he was told by Baba Ji. It seems that whenever he hit the brick with his shoe, the faqir in Multan sustained the blow. The faqir tried to use his occult power to ward off these blows but could not do so. Then he sat down in meditation and telepathically tried to contact the powerful faqir who was causing this problem. He saw Baba Ji who told the faqir to come to see him in Bhucho. The faqir immediately set out for Bhucho to see Baba Ji. In the mean time Baba Ji called the Sikh and said to him, "The faqir who gave you the curse is coming today. Go and receive him at the railway station and bring him here". The Sikh went and brought the faqir. Baba Ji told the faqir that giving curses on trifling matters was not good for faqirs. The faqir asked for Baba Ji's forgiveness, promised never to repeat such childish things and went back.

One day some traders were bringing a few cartloads of raw sugar lumps (Gur) to the market of Gobindpura. As they were passing by Roomi (Baba Harnam Singh Ji's Dera outside Bhucho) Baba Ji asked Bahal Das to go and find out what they were carrying. When Bahal Das went and enquired, the traders thought that the Sant wanted some raw sugar. They lied and said that they were carrying salt. Bahal Das came back and told Baba Ji what he was told by the traders. Baba Ji smiled and said, "If they say it is salt then salt will it be". When the traders reached the market and started unloading their goods they were amazed to see that all bags on the carts were full of rock salt only.

A Sikh couple once came from Mandi Bahaudin to visit their relatives in Kachi Bhucho. They had hardly been there for a few days when the wife fell seriously ill and in spite of all possible medical help passed away within a couple of days. According to Sikh tradition her body was prepared for cremation and was being taken to the cremation ground when someone noticed movement in her body. The funeral procession was immediately stopped and everyone was amazed to see that she opened her eyes. She was then brought back and within a few days was cured of her illness. She then told her story that the Yama (the angel of death) was taking her when on the way he came by a holy person who told the Yama to return her to her body. She also said that the holy man before leaving said that his Dera was in Roomi near Bhucho Kalan. Everyone was amazed to hear this fantastic story.

Now the wife insisted that she be taken to this holy man so she could express her gratitude. After a few days the couple reached Roomi and after waiting for a day Bhai Sawan Singh, a great devotee of Baba Harnam Singh Ji took them to see Baba Ji. As soon as the lady saw Baba Ji she immediately said, "This is the holy man who saved me from the Yama". Then she moved forward to touch Baba Ji's feet. But he did not let her do so. Baba Ji then advised them to contemplate Naam and live an honest life. They wanted to donate some money to the Dera but Baba Ji asked them to spend it to have an *Akhand Paath* of Guru Granth Sahib. They, however, insisted and a small sum was accepted for the Langar.

One morning Baba Harnam Singh Ji was sitting in meditation in a field. A camelherder, Sucha Singh, was grazing his herd in an adjoining field. Suddenly it started raining and the weather became cold. Sucha Singh saw Baba Ji sitting there in the rain without any warm clothing. He ran to his house and asked his mother to give him a woollen shawl so he could cover Baba Ji who was in meditation, oblivious to rain and cold weather. The mother gave him a shawl and Sucha Singh ran back to the field. However, on reaching near Baba Ji he was amazed to see that the space around where Baba Ji was sitting was dry and not a drop of rain had fallen on him. He, nevertheless, covered Baba Ji with the shawl and went away.

One day a devotee named Sher Singh who was a wrestler came to Baba Ji and said, "Please give me some seva". Baba Ji said, "I do have a seva for you. Stay here for a few days, continue your daily exercise routine and keep yourself fit, and you will get it". Sher Singh started staying at the Dera. After a few days Baba Ji asked Sher Singh to procure a sturdy bamboo staff from a nearby market. Sher Singh went and brought a staff that was to his liking. Baba Ji then said to him, "Daily apply some oil to the staff to fortify it and practice with it your art of fighting". Sher Singh was surprised to hear such strange words from Baba

Ji but did as he was told.

After a couple of weeks two Nanga Sadhus (naked ascetics) came and camped in the small cluster of bushes at a short distance from the Dera. They then started their ritual fire. Baba Ji, who for some reason of his own had taken a vow not to face fire, told Sher Singh to go and have the fire extinguished. Sher Singh took a bucket of water and the staff, as told by Baba Ji and went to the Sadhus. He told them to put the fire out but the Sadhus rushed towards him to snatch the bucket of water from him. Sher Singh poured the water on the fire and extinguished it and got ready to fight with the Sadhus using his staff. In a few minutes the Sadhus ran away. Sher Singh came back to Baba Ji and told what had happened. Baba Ji said, "This is the seva for which I had retained you here. Now you can go. I am pleased with your service".

Sant Baba Nand Sigh Ji of Kaleran[8], who happens to be one of the most revered and famous Sikh mystics of twentieth century, was receiving education on Sikh scriptures and philosophy from Baba Wadhawa Singh at Lehra Khana. Within a short time Baba Wadhawa Singh noticed the very high spiritual level of Baba Nand Singh Ji. He therefore took Baba Nand Singh to Bhucho because he felt that for further advancement in spiritual realm only Baba Harnam Singh Ji was the right teacher for Baba Nand Singh. On reaching Bhucho, Baba Wadhawa Singh presented Baba Nand Singh Ji to Baba Harnam Singh Ji. Before Baba Wadhawa Singh could say anything about Baba Nand Singh, Baba Harnam Singh Ji said, "I have been waiting for quite some time for my man. It is good that you have brought him today". Baba Wadhawa Singh then returned to Lehra Khana.

A shepherd named Bhan Singh was one day grazing his herd of goats and sheep near the Dera. He became thirsty and went inside Baba Harnam Singh Ji's room. Baba Ji smiled and said, "Bhan Singh, do you want to drink water"? Bhan Singh was surprised to hear his name because he had never seen Baba Ji before. After drinking water Bhan Singh thought of serving some milk to Baba Ji. Even before he could express this thought, Baba Ji said, "Bhan Singh, bring your goats here so I can have some milk". Now Bhan Singh was certain of the extremely high spiritual level of Baba Ji. He brought his goats and Baba Ji milked them to his requirement. After that day Bhan Singh took upon himself to daily bring milk for Baba Ji.

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[8] The life story of Baba Nand Singh Ji is given in a separate section of this book.

Bhan Singh had two sons who passed away within a short period. He cried so much that he lost his eye sight. Also he was in a state of ultimate hopelessness because he was almost sixty year of age and knew that soon he would be too old to work and there would be no one in the world to look after him and his wife. Bhan Singh also had a daughter who had developed great devotion to Baba Ji. She realized the plight of her father and one day brought him to Baba Ji. Baba Ji asked Bhan Singh if he had a wish. Bhan Singh was too bashful to ask for a son in such old age. But Baba Ji insisted and finally Bhan Singh revealed his wish for having a son. Baba Ji closed his eyes and stayed quiet for quite a long time. Then he opened his eyes and said, "I have requested Guru Nanak who has very kindly acceded to my request. You will have a son". After a year a son was born in Bhan Singh's house who turned out to be a Gursikh and an exemplary son.

A devotee who used to come to Baba Harnam Singh Ji quite often, one day came and said, "Baba Ji, all my life I have been working hard with only one desire, to be called a "lakhpati" (to possess one hundred thousand rupees); but have not succeeded in fulfilling this desire. I am therefore in a state of great disappointment". Baba Ji said, "Accumulating wealth is not the purpose of human life. The Gurus enjoin us to accumulate the wealth of Naam which brings peace here and liberation in the hereafter. The worldly wealth brings nothing but problems and catastrophes in life. So, forget this evil desire and start contemplating Naam. Go to Sant Bahal Das' Dera and he will teach you the technique to meditate on Naam". The man went to Sant Bahal Das but returned in a couple of months to Baba Ji and repeated his desire for wealth. Baba Ji said, "If you insist then your desire will be fulfilled but I warn you that the consequences may be very sad. Now go and start a business".

The man went away and started some business which soon was quite successful and money started pouring in. He started dreaming of expanding his business manifold and for this purpose started giving extra cash to one of his friends in trust so that he could get it back when the time came. In a relatively short period this amount exceeded one hundred thousand rupees. He then asked his friend to return the money so that he could invest it towards expansion of the business. The friend was not an honest person. He put him off for some time and finally got him murdered, thus the prediction of Baba Ji came to be true.

Seth Nanak Chand of village Ram Pura Phool was a cotton factory owner. One year his business ran into substantial loss. He had heard Baba Harnam Singh Ji's fame and decided to visit him and request him to pray for a profitable year. On his way to the Dera he thought that if Baba Ji gave him the boon for which he was going then he would donate five thousand bricks for a nice room at the Dera. As he reached the Dera, Baba Ji came out of his room and said, "Nanak Chand, at this place five thousand bricks will not be sufficient. Over here several hundred thousand bricks will be utilized to construct the buildings". Nanak Chand was surprised to hear from Baba Ji his name and what he had just thought. He forgot the purpose of his visit and instead went back to his house to tell this miracle of Baba Ji to his wife. The wife told him that instead of asking for profit in the business they should request Baba Ji for something really precious - a son which they did not have even after many years of marriage.

The couple then went to the Dera and after taking permission went in to see Baba Ji. As was his custom, Baba Ji asked for their names, caste, residence and the purpose of their visit. The Seth's wife said, "Baba Ji, with God's grace we have no dearth of money, but we do not have a son. Kindly bless us with the gift of a son". Baba Ji said, "Since you have a lot of money, you will have to pay ten thousand rupees for the son". The couple agreed and then Baba Ji said, "Within a year a son will be born to you who will have six fingers on each hand". The couple thanked Baba Ji and went back happily. Within a year a son was born to them who, as Baba Ji had said, had six fingers in both hands. A few weeks after the birth of the son Nanak Chand went to Baba Ji and placed five thousand rupees before him. Baba Ji reminded him of his promise of ten thousand rupees but Nanak Chand said, "Please accept five thousand because the business is running in loss these days". He then left. The next morning Baba Ji gave the five thousand and five rupees to a devotee and said, "Go to Nanak Chand and tell him that I am returning his money with interest. Now I want my thing back". The devotee went to Nanak Chand's house where he met his wife whom he gave the money and Baba Ji's message. The wife immediately ran to the factory and scolded her husband for his miserly conduct and backing out of his promise. She insisted that both of them must at once go to Baba Ji and beg for his forgiveness before anything bad happens to their son.

The couple went to the Dera, placed ten thousand rupees before Baba Ji and humbly requested to be forgiven for their misbehaviour and begged for the safety of their son. Baba Ji smiled and said, "Nothing is going to happen to your son, and I am not going to take your money either; because, for an ascetic money has no use". When the couple insisted, Baba Ji said, "Alright, go and give this money to such and such person (he gave them the name) as my gift. He needs it more than you do".

The Zaildar[9] of Jaito was a devotee of Baba Harnam Singh Ji. Once he sent a letter through a messenger. He had written in the letter that on the complaint of some calumniator the English Deputy Commissioner of the area was planning to raid the Dera because he had been told that Baba Ji was giving refuge to thieves and murderers in the Dera and possessed a cannon. Baba Ji smiled after listening to the contents of the letter, which a devotee was reading, and said, "With Guru Nanak's grace nothing is going to happen here".

After a few days the Deputy Commissioner of Faridkot called a meeting in which the police officers of the district, the tax collectors and the Maharajas of Patiala and Faridkot were also invited. All present in the meeting praised the highly religious and spiritual personality of Baba Ji. However, the Deputy Commissioner still wanted to satisfy himself. He went and surveyed the site and was convinced that the Dera was nothing but a center of religious and spiritual teachings. Some devotees had said that Baba Ji's word was like a cannonball; it never missed the mark. This is what the Superintendent of Police (an Englishman) had heard and misinterpreted.

The Superintendent came and apologised for the mistake and promised to Baba Ji to punish the complainants. Baba Ji said, "There is no need of punishing the slanderers, because God will punish them". This officer was so much impressed with Baba Ji's personality that he started coming to the Dera and became a devotee.

One day a Sikh named Ram Singh, from Kal Jharani village (Dist. Bathinda) came to Baba Ji. He was in a really bad shape. Baba Ji asked him the purpose of his visit. He truthfully said, "Sir, I am a compulsive gambler and have lost everything in gambling. As a result I cannot feed my family who are starving. I have heard about your mystic powers. Kindly tell me how I could recoup my losses". Baba Ji said, "I have no place for gamblers here. You must leave immediately". Ram Singh started crying and said, "I have no place to go to and no one to seek help from. Please have mercy on me. My children will die of starvation". Baba Ji said, "You must give up gambling and get into the service of Guru Nanak's devotees if you want me to help you". Ram Singh agreed and started working at the Dera with humility and single-minded devotion. After some time Baba Ji asked him to bring his family also. Ram Singh, who was by now convinced of super-natural powers of Baba Ji, went home, convinced his reluctant wife and brought his family at the Dera.

At the Dera Baba Ji gave instructions to the sevadar of the langar to take good care of Ram Singh's family. They were therefore clothed and fed properly and were quite happy there.

One day Baba Ji called Ram Singh and his wife and said, "Your selfless seva has been accepted by Guru Nanak. Now you should go back to your village. Guru Nanak will take care of your livelihood". The family returned to the village and soon Ram Singh had gifts from some of his old friends to carry out his household needs. One of his friends offered him partnership in his farming business and the family soon became comfortably well off.

Bhai Waryam Singh was an old devotee of Baba Ji. He had a very melodious voice with which he used to recite from Guru Granth Sahib. Baba Ji was very pleased with his seva. Once his only son, Chanda Singh fell sick. He had obstruction in his urine tract and therefore could not pass urine. The doctors tried all kinds of medications but none made any difference in his condition. Finally they decided to perform surgery, which, those days was considered quite dangerous. Bhai Waryam Singh came to Baba Ji and described the problem. He said, "Sir, your Chanda is in deep trouble; please save his life". Baba Ji said, "Since he is my Chanda, nothing bad is going to happen to him".

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[9] A zaildar is a government functionary who oversees the work of numberdars of a few villages.

The same night Chanda Singh was in the hospital because the next morning he was to be operated upon. He had great difficulty sleeping because of high pressure in the bladder. Somehow at about midnight he finally went to sleep. He saw in dream that Baba Ji was touching his body gently at the sore spot. He woke up and ran to the bath room to pass urine. Within a few minutes all the pressure in the bladder was relieved and he slept peacefully the rest of the night. The next morning when the doctor came to take him to the operation theatre he was amazed to see Chanda Singh smiling. On examination he was found to be fully recovered.

Munshee Singh was a sevadar of Baba Ji and lived at the Dera. One day a devotee gave an offering of twenty five rupees to him to be presented to Baba Ji. Munshee Singh, however, became greedy and decided to spend the money for his own purpose in the town. The next morning he started for the town, but as soon as he crossed the boundary of Bhucho village he lost his eyesight and could not see anything. He then turned around towards the Dera. He was amazed when after taking only a few steps in that direction he could see again. He repeated this a few times and found that the result was the same every time. Then he realized that it was because of the money that he was taking with him with the dishonest intention of spending on himself. He then went to Lal Singh, the numberdar of the village, described him the whole incident and said, "Please take this money to Baba Ji and return it. Also be kind to request on my behalf for Baba Ji's forgiveness. I am too ashamed to go back to the Dera". So saying, he gave the twenty five rupees to Lal Singh and left. Lal Singh went to the Dera, related the story to Baba Ji and returned the money after apologising on behalf of Munshee Singh.

In Karaachi (now in Pakistan) two Sindhi brothers had a jewellery business. They had unshakeable faith in Guru Nanak and ran their business with honesty. Soon their business was thriving. One day an English couple came to their store. The lady was interested in a particular diamond but did not want to pay the asking price. While bargaining for the price, in her ego she insinuated that the jewellers were not running their business honestly. At this one of the brothers got angry, took back the diamond and asked the couple to leave the store. The Englishman felt insulted and was enraged but dragged his wife and hurriedly left the store. As they were descending the store steps in a hurry the lady tripped and fell down several steps hitting her head against the sharp edges of the steps. Because of her head injuries she was taken to the hospital where she passed away in a few days. The Englishman who was a high official, lodged a complaint against the jeweller brothers and because of his influence, the brothers were charged with the murder of the lady and were put in jail.

The two brothers, while in jail, decided that under such circumstances only Guru Nanak could come to their help. So they earnestly started meditating and reciting Japu Ji for several hours everyday. One night Guru Nanak came in the dream of one of the brothers and said, "Your devotion has been accepted. The decision of the case will be in your favour. After you are released you should go to Bhucho to Baba Harnam Singh Ji who will instruct you to enhance your spiritual level". The magistrate who was hearing the case gave his verdict that the jeweller brothers had no hand in the death of the lady and were therefore to be honourably acquitted. Immediately after being released they started for Bhucho.

One morning Baba Harnam Singh Ji called his close devotee, Bhai Rattan Singh Daroli, and asked him to go to the railway station to receive two Sindhi brothers who were arriving by such and such train. Bhai Rattan Singh went and recognized them as Baba Ji had told him and brought them to the Dera. Baba Ji received them and praised their devotion to Guru Nanak. He then said, "Guru Nanak has sent you here so that you could tell the congregation that the Guru comes to the help of those who have unshakeable faith in him. Now you should take rest here for a few days and meditate on Guru Nanak". Then Baba Ji told them the procedure to meditate. The two brothers stayed at the Dera and followed the meditation procedure prescribed by Baba Ji. Soon they felt a remarkable enhancement in their spiritual state. Then one day they described their story in the congregation. The next day Baba Ji bade them farewell and they returned home.

Once Baba Harnam Singh Ji said to his foremost disciple, Baba Nand Singh Ji, "Your intense contemplation and devotion to Guru Nanak has been accepted by Akaal Purakh. Now you deserve to sit on a throne". Baba Nand Singh Ji humbly replied, "Sir, I am a very lowly servant of yours. You are the one who should sit on the throne and let me sit at your feet". Baba Harnam Singh Ji said, "Now your time has arrived, therefore you should get the deserved honour". Baba Nand Singh Ji respectfully declined the offer. At this Baba Harnam Singh Ji said, "Alright, then you go and fill your belly by begging". Baba Nand Singh Ji bowed and left to beg in the adjoining villages. The next day when he returned to the Dera, Baba Harnam Singh Ji repeated the previous day's offer. Baba Nand Singh Ji again declined and was ordered to go and beg which he dutifully did again. The third day again the same words were repeated by both mystics and as a result Baba Nand Singh Ji went to beg for alms. When he returned the fourth day, Baba Harnam Singh Ji said to Baba Nand Singh Ji, "You have passed the test with flying colours. Now you can go anywhere you please. Guru Nanak is going to be always with you. Spread Guru Nanak's message among the masses. Rajas will come and bow before you". This is exactly what happened. Baba Nand Singh Ji turned out to be the most revered Sikh mystic of his time.

Sant Dhana Singh belonged to the village Rola Hari. In young age he left his home and joined a group of roaming Sants. In this group he was taught Sanskrit, Hindu scriptures and the traditional Hindu procedures of meditation. He thus became an accomplished scholar of Hindu scriptures. He also continued the routine of meditation but the equipoise state, for which he had been working for years, still could not be achieved.

One day when he happened to be staying near the Dera of Baba Harnam Singh Ji, he got up early in the morning and went for a bath in the pond that was located at the foot of the mound where Baba Ji's room was situated. At that time Baba Ji was taking a walk. When he heard the sound of someone entering the pond, he uttered aloud a Sanskrit Salok which meant, "What you are seeking cannot be obtained without the grace of a true Guru". Sant Dhana Singh replied, "Is there such a perfect preceptor in this age of Kali in whose company one could attain to Akaal Purakh"? Baba Ji said, "I guarantee that if someone obeys without questioning the command of the preceptor, he can reach the goal".

Sant Dhana Singh understood this metaphor and immediately came, bowed and stood with folded hands in front of Baba Ji. Baba Ji said, "If you want to reach Akaal Purakh you will have to meditate and recite Gurbani the way you are instructed and beg for food only once a week and live on it for the rest of the week". Sant Dhana Singh bowed his head and agreed to all these conditions. He obediently started practising the meditation and recitation of Gurbani as told by Baba Ji. After some time he started feeling as if he could perceive Akaal Purakh within as well as without. Baba Ji then called him and said, "Now you have reached close to the goal. You must go and settle down at Bhai Roopa village and never exhibit or boast about the powers that you possess". Sant Dhana Singh bowed his head and went to Bhai Roopa village where he spent the rest of his life. Off and on he came to Bhucho to have the holy sight (darshan) of Baba Ji.

One day Baba Harnam Singh Ji called Sant Dhana Singh from Bhai Roopa village, gave him 101 rupees and said, "Go to Amritsar and make the offering of Karhah Prashad for this money at Harimandir and beg for the Blessings of Guru Ram Das; but be alert on the way". Sant Dhana Singh took the money and started for Amritsar. On the way he had to cross the river at Harike quay. When he reached there the only boatman present told him that his son was dying of intense pain in the stomach, therefore he had to go home and could not take the boat across. Sant Dhana Singh accompanied the boatman to his house and saw that his son was indeed in grave condition. He took some water, recited Japu Ji on it and gave it to the crying boy. Within a short time the pain was gone and the boy got up as if nothing had happened to him. The boatman thanked Sant Dhana Singh and took him across the river. Sant Ji went to Amritsar and did as he was told by Baba Ji and then returned to Bhucho.

In Bhucho Baba Harnam Singh Ji called his personal attendant, Neela Singh, and said, "Sant Dhana Singh will arrive here shortly. Do not bring him to me. Tell him to stand and wait till he is called. Also do not serve him any food or water until I say so". After a short time when Sant Dhana Singh came, Neela Singh stopped him and told him what Baba Ji had said. Dhana Singh stopped at the foot of the mound and started waiting for Baba Ji's permission. For two days he was standing there without food or water. The third day Baba Ji asked Neela Singh to serve Langar to Sant Dhana Singh where he was standing and then bring him in. When Sant Dhana Singh, after having Langar came, Baba Ji said, "You have failed the test. You were told to stay alert on the way but you worked miracle to relieve boatman's son from his pain which was against the will of Akaal Purakh. Now you should go back to Bhai Roopa village and do not come here until called". Sant Dhana Singh humbly said, "Sir, your wish is my command, but I request that kindly let me continue the seva of collecting milk from my village and sending it to the Dera". To this Baba Ji agreed and Sant Dhana Singh returned to his village. For a long time he could not come to Bhucho until one day Baba Ji said, "The penance period of Sant Dhana Singh is over. He can come in now".

Once a group of roaming Sants came to Baba Harnam Singh Ji and told that the king of Nepal had started a campaign of arresting and putting all the Sants passing though his country in jail. He considered them good-for-nothing freeloaders who were burden to the society. After arresting, he asked every Sant either to answer some of his esoteric questions, or make a miracle. If he failed to do so then he was put in jail. Hundreds of Sants going on pilgrimage of Kailash and Mansarovar Lake, who had to pass through Nepal territory, were apprehended. Baba Ji asked one of his disciples, Pandit Sri Ram Singh, to go to Nepal, answer the King's questions and get the release of all the Sants. If need be, he should also make some miracles. Sri Ram Singh went to Nepal and succeeded in getting an audience with the king who, as usual, started asking him questions. After the king had asked the first question, Sri Ram Singh said, "Your majesty, I know all the questions that you are going to ask, and I have already written their answers. Please look under your seat". The king was amazed when he found a paper under his seat which contained the answers to all his intended questions. He got up from his throne and touched Sri Ram Singh's feet who asked him to release all the Sants and in future not to bother any Sant in his kingdom. The king did as he was told and Sri Ram Singh returned to Bhucho.

One day Baba Ji called his personal attendant, Neela Singh and said, "Tomorrow a group of one hundred Sants is arriving. They will stay here for five days. We have to make all arrangements for their comfortable stay. So prepare a piece of ground for their camps outside the Dera and purchase the necessary groceries for the Langar". Neela Singh immediately talked to several devotees to bring needed provisions and utensils for the preparation and serving of Langar and seating of one hundred persons.

The next day, as was predicted by Baba Ji, a group of roaming Sadhus arrived at the Dera. Baba Ji welcomed the leader of the group and said to him, "This is Guru Nanak's house. All arrangements for your food and lodging for five days have been made. Please make yourself comfortable". The Sadhu was surprised that Baba Ji had known their intention of staying there for five days. He bowed and went to the camp ground where their tents were being pitched.

In the evening the Sadhus came to partake the Langar. One of the Sadhus was proud of his occult powers and in his ego he wanted to impress Baba Ji. He tried to make the food of the Langar vanish. But in spite of all his efforts he could not succeed in his evil design. During the next few days of their stay he again tried to play some tricks but failed every time. On the fifth day when the group was ready to depart, Baba Ji called this Sadhu and said, "You are wasting your life in playing with occult powers. In Guru Nanak's house humility and control of such powers is the greatest virtue". The Sadhu fell down on Baba Ji's feet and begged for his forgiveness. He promised never to play with his powers again and then departed with the group.

A Pandit from Nabha went to Benaras to study Sanskrit and Hindu scriptures. In a few years he became an accomplished scholar of Sanskrit and Vedas. He became very proud of his knowledge but was not happy in life because even after several years of marriage he was issueless. Some relatives suggested to him to go to Baba Harnam Singh Ji and request for a son. He went to Bhucho but as he was bowing before Baba Ji, ego of his knowledge came to his mind and he asked Baba Ji a question in the form of a Sanskrit Salok. Baba Ji answered it also in a Sanskrit Salok. He then asked another question, again in a Sanskrit Salok, to which Baba Ji answered the same way. He was thinking of asking the third question when Baba Ji stopped him and said, "You came here to beg for a son and now want to test my knowledge in Sanskrit"? The Pandit was amazed that Baba Ji knew the desire with which he had come there. He regretted and begged for Baba Ji's forgiveness and then humbly expressed his desire for a son. Baba Ji said, "Would you like to have one or two sons"? The Pandit replied, "Sir, if you are kind, please bless me with two sons". Baba Ji smiled and said, "You will have two sons". Then he gave some details of certain physical signs on the body of each of his to-be-born sons. In a few years the Pandit had two sons and each had the signs described by Baba Ji. The Pandit became a devotee and came regularly to the Dera.

Dr. Mathura Das had opened an eye-hospital in Moga. He heard about Baba Harnam Singh Ji and thought of getting his blessings for the new enterprise. When he reached at the Dera it was time of Langar and Baba Ji was performing his routine (requesting Akaal Purakh to bless the food) and in doing so was looking at the roti (bread) and *daal* (lentil soup) from very short distance. Dr Mathura Das thought that Baba Ji had very poor eyesight and he would cure him by performing the surgery. Baba Ji then asked everyone to sit down and partake the Langar. Dr. Mathura Das also sat down in the pangat and took Langar with everyone else. After the Langar Baba Ji said to the doctor, "Can you see ants on that wall with tiny crumbs of food in their mouths"? The doctor could not see anything. Baba Ji asked him to walk closer to the wall and check. The doctor went near the wall and saw that what Baba Ji had said was true. Baba Ji then said, "I have no problem with my eyesight and, by the way, I treat the problems of a different kind of eyes (spiritual)". The doctor understood what Baba Ji had meant. He bowed before him and requested for his blessings for the new enterprise. Baba Ji blessed him and he departed happily.

Once a beggar, who was inflicted with leprosy heard about the healing powers of Baba Harnam Singh Ji. He came to the Dera and requested for an audience with Baba Ji. After getting permission he was brought in. Baba Ji looked at him and said to the attendant, "Take him down to the tank and have him take a bath there. Then cover him with a fresh white sheet and bring him back to me". The attendant did as he was told and brought the leper back. Baba Ji then called two devotees and told them to recite aloud Sukhmani Sahib thirteen times in front of the leper. It took about 15 hours to complete the 13 recitations. Baba Ji then asked that the sheet around the leper's body be removed. When the sheet was removed everyone was amazed because the leper's body had absolutely no sign of leprosy. Baba Ji said, "Sukhmani Sahib has the power to cure any malady". Then he advised the beggar to recite the name of God according to his own religion and earn his living by honest means.

Baba Harnam Singh Ji although a devoted Sikh himself respected all faiths - had prejudice against none. Among his foremost disciples Baba Nand Singh Ji was a devotee of Guru Nanak, Sant Bahal Das was an Udasi, Sant Chint Ram a devotee of Shiv Ji and Sant Sri Ram Singh a devotee of Ram Chander. Even if a Muslim came to him, and many did, he advised him to have full faith in his own religion and pray the way his religion advised.

Once a Brahmin who was a devotee of Lord Krishna came to Baba Ji and requested that he would like to recite Geeta before him. Baba Ji readily agreed and the Brahmin started reciting Geeta. When he reached the portion where there is a dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjun he felt as if Baba Ji was speaking the portion of Lord Krishna's dialogue. He opened his eyes and saw Lord Krishna sitting in place of Baba Ji. He fell upon Baba Ji's feet and said, "How ignorant of me; I did not recognize that I was reciting Geeta to Lord Krishna himself. Similarly once a Mullah came to Baba Ji. He had some doubt about the meaning of a particular stanza (ayat) of Quran. Baba Ji without having any question from the Mullah recited that stanza and gave its explanation. The Mullah touched Baba Ji's feet and requested for grace. Baba Ji told him to meditate on the Kalima. The Mullah departed happily.

Once a Brahmin, who had spent a good portion of his life studying Vedas and Shastras came to see Baba Harnam Singh Ji. Baba Ji asked him if he had any question. He replied in affirmative and sat down to open a Sanskrit Granth that he had brought with him. Before he could open the book and ask any question Baba Ji took a piece of paper from under his pillow and gave it to the Brahmin saying, "Here is the answer to your question". The Brahmin, in amazement, unfolded the paper and read what was written on it. He was doubly astounded because the answer was exactly what he wanted to hear and the writing on the paper was identical to that of his teacher (guru) from whom he had learned the Sanskrit scriptures and who was dead for many years. He asked Baba Ji about the scribe who had written the answer on that paper. Baba Ji gave him the name of his guru and said, "He came here and gave me this answer just before you arrived". The Brahmin begged for Baba Ji's forgiveness because he had harboured doubt about his spiritual capability. Baba Ji told him to give up religious discussions merely to feed his ego and start contemplating Lord Vishnu who was the deity of the Brahmin.

One day Baba Ji told his personal attendant, Neela Singh, to go to the nearest market and buy one hundred 'chadars' (sheets to completely cover human body and face) and 200 sheets to cover the male nudity. Neela Singh took munshi Hardit Singh with him and brought all items from Bathinda. Someone asked Baba Ji what was the need for all those sheets? Baba Ji said, "In a couple of days a group of Nanga Sadhus (nude ascetics) is going to arrive here. They would wish to see me but I do not want them to come nude in the Dera".

After a couple of days a large group of nude Sadhus (comprising male as well female sadhus) arrived outside the Dera. Baba Ji sent some devotees to have the Sadhus camp outside the boundary of the Dera and take food from the Langar. The Langar was prepared and after Baba Ji's approval (in his unusual way) the food was sent to the Sadhus who enjoyed it immensely. After that, as Baba Ji had instructed, the devotees who served the food told the leader of the group that all members of his group had to cover their nudity before they could come and see Baba Ji. All the sheets were then given to them. The leader was amazed to see the new sheets whose number was exactly equal to the number of Sadhus in the group.

The next morning, as wished by Baba Ji the female Sadhus covered themselves with the chadars and the male ones covered their nudity and came to the Dera. The leader told Baba Ji that they had come all the way from Badrinath after hearing about him. He had spiritual dialogue for some time and the next day they departed singing the praises of Baba Ji.

Kehar Singh, the numberdar of Bhucho, used to come to the Dera off and on and do seva according to his capacity and ability. One day Baba Ji heard that one of Kehar Singh's sons was getting married and arrangements were being made to hire a dancing girl for the occasion. Baba Ji called Kehar Singh and said, "I have heard that you are planning to have a dancing girl on the wedding of your son. This is against the Gurmat and should not be done". Kehar Singh said, "Sir, my sons have already made advance payment to the girl and she is coming. I am helpless because my sons do not listen to me". Baba Ji said, "When she comes, give her full payment that has been agreed upon and send her back".

The day before the wedding when the dancing girl arrived, Kehar Singh went to her, paid her the full amount and told her to leave. The girl was surprised because this was the first time anyone had declined to see her dance and at the same time pay the full amount. She asked Kehar Singh the reason for this strange behaviour. Kehar Singh told her about Baba Ji and said, "I am paying you because he has ordered me to do so". The girl asked Kehar Singh that she would like to see such a holy person. Kehar Singh gave her the directions to reach the Dera and the girl went to see Baba Ji, accompanied by her two companions. On reaching the Dera she requested the sevadar to see Baba Ji. After getting permission she was brought before Baba Ji. She bowed before and sincerely regretted for her previously committed misdeeds. Baba Ji asked the sevadar to take her out and bring her back after she has washed her hands, feet and face. When she returned Baba Ji asked her to follow him as he recited the Kalima. She did so and then Baba Ji asked her to daily meditate on the Kalima, supplicate before Allah to be forgiven for her previous sins and lead a clean life henceforth. The girl bowed and then departed.

Bhai Mangal Singh of Tunwali village was a devotee of Baba Harnam Singh Ji. He used to come to the Dera quite often and sometimes even stayed there for a few days. Once when he was coming to Bhucho, a few of his friends also expressed desire to accompany him and see Baba Ji. On the way they said to Mangal Singh, "You have been coming to Baba Ji for such a long time, have you ever witnessed any miracle of his? This question had a tinge of sarcasm but Mangal Singh did not answer and kept quiet. On reaching Bhucho they purchased sugar drops (Patashas) for offering to Baba Ji and then started towards the Dera. On the way one of them took a couple of sugar drops and ate them. Mangal Singh said, "Baba Ji is not going to accept our offering because you have tasted the drops first". The man laughed and said, "How is he to know that I have tasted the drops"?

On reaching the Dera they took permission to go in the presence of

Baba Ji. After obeisance they placed the large bag of sugar drops before him. Baba Ji addressed the person who had tasted the drops and said, "This offering cannot be accepted because you have taken two drops out of it and tasted them. Also do you want to see another miracle or this is enough"? All of them fell on the feet of Baba Ji and humbly requested for forgiveness. Baba Ji smiled and said, "Never test the spiritual capabilities of a saintly person".

The numberdar of Kangar village was a devotee of Baba Ji. He used to visit the Dera whenever he could and always brought a pitcher full of milk for the Langar. One day when he was leaving for the Dera, one of his friends expressed desire to accompany him. The two started for Bhucho, but on the way the numberdar discovered that his friend was carrying a bottle of liquor on him. He told his friend that he would not be allowed to see Baba Ji if he carried the bottle with him. The friend said, "I will hide the bottle in the bush and then accompany you to the Dera". He thus went towards the bush but did not hide the bottle there and kept it hidden on him. When they reached in the presence of Baba Ji, he said to the numberdar, "Your friend has lied to you. He did not part with the bottle which he is still carrying with him". The friend said, "No sir, I did leave the bottle of liquor in the bush". Then taking out the bottle he said, "This bottle is full of water". Baba Ji smiled and said, "Alright, it is water".

When the two left the Dera the friend said to the numberdar, "I had heard a lot about spiritual powers of Baba Ji, but I think most of it is only myth. People have a habit of exaggerating things". When the numberdar asked him the reason for such a statement, the friend said, "I lied to Baba Ji that the bottle was full of water when actually it had liquor in it because I had not hidden it in the bush". Then he took out the bottle to show it to the numberdar. But to his utter amazement when he uncorked the bottle, it was found to be full of only water. He started crying and requested his friend to take him back to Baba Ji so that he could repent for the sin he had committed by lying to him and request for his forgiveness.

After a few days the numberdar took his friend back to Baba Ji where he repented for what he had done and humbly requested to be forgiven. Baba Ji told him to give up liquor and all related vices and start meditating on the Name of Akaal Purakh. The man obeyed what Baba Ji said to him and started leading a clean life.

Baba Nand Singh Ji once came to Bhucho, with a few of his close devotees, in order to pay homage to Baba Harnam Singh Ji. Because of paucity of time (for some reason of his own he had to go to the Majha tract in a hurry) he took a short cut to reach Bhucho. This involved the use of a service road by the side of a canal which is used only for official purposes. Baba Nand Singh Ji, after reaching Bhucho paid his obeisance to Baba Harnam Singh Ji and immediately left.

The canal overseer, Channan Singh, who was a big egoist and a non-believer, came to know that Baba Nand Singh Ji's entourage had used the service road. He immediately followed them and reached Bhucho. By that time, however, Baba Nand Singh Ji had already left. So he went to Baba Harnam Singh Ji and said, "I have come to know that (Baba) Nand Singh used the service road which is illegal. Tell me where he is because I want to get him punished for this illegal act". Baba Harnam Singh Ji said, "Baba Nand Singh is a great mystic. Guru Nanak abides in his heart. You must be respectful to him. As a matter of fact you should consider yourself fortunate that he passed through your area of duty". But Channan Singh was adamant and said some disrespectful words for Baba Nand Singh Ji. On hearing such insultive words about his foremost disciple and a mystic par excellence, Baba Harnam Singh Ji became furious. He rubbed his palms and cursed Channan Singh by saying, "You will suffer the worst fate here as well as hereafter for using such words for one who has become one with Guru Nanak". Then he asked his attendant Neela Singh to throw Channan Singh out of the Dera.

As soon as Baba Harnam Singh Ji uttered these words Channan Singh felt as if all his strength had been derived out of his body. He could hardly walk up to his car. Soon afterwards he was inflicted by a disease which no doctor could even diagnose. He had to leave his job because he could not even stand. He then realized that all this was happening to him because of Baba Ji's curse. He went to Sant Gulab Singh Ji of Gholia who was known to successfully treat almost any incurable disease. Sant Gulab Singh treated Channan Singh for some time but his condition grew worse. On asking how and when he had caught the disease, Channan Singh told the whole incident that had happened at Bhucho. Sant Gulab Singh said, "No one in this world can cure you. There is, however, only one way to save your life and that is to somehow have Baba Harnam Singh Ji take back his curse". He further added, "I have a plan. I will take you to Baba Nand Singh Ji who is a very kind and humble person and request him to plead your case with Baba Harnam Singh Ji". Sant Gulab Singh then took Channan Singh to Baba Nand Singh Ji and told him the woeful story and requested him to plead for Channan Singh. Baba Nand Singh Ji said, "In a few days when I go to Bhucho I will request Baba Harnam Singh Ji that Channan Singh be forgiven. However, to forgive or not, is entirely up to him". After a few days Baba Nand Singh Ji went to Bhucho and one day when he found Baba Harnam Singh Ji in appropriate mood he mentioned Channan Singh and requested that he be forgiven because he had been punished enough. Baba Harnam Singh Ji said, "Please do not even mention the name of that sinner to me. He can never be forgiven". Baba Nand Singh Ji then kept quiet. Shortly afterwards Channan Singh died a miserable death.

Baba Harnam Singh Ji knew the time of his departure from this world. It seems that as this time approached closer he started to wrap up his duties charged to him by Akaal Purakh. One day he sent for his two disciples, Sant Bahal Das and Achint Ram with the message to come and see him. At the same time he sent a telepathic message to his foremost disciple Baba Nand Singh Ji[10] also to come to Bhucho. Within a few days all three arrived at the Dera. Baba Nand Singh Ji also brought some of his devotees with him.

Baba Harnam Singh Ji asked the three disciples to give him the names of their close devotees so that all of them may be liberated. Lists of all these devotees were prepared and presented to Baba Ji. Then he said, "Soon I will be leaving this world. This is the will of Akaal Purakh; so no one should try to stop me (this was especially for Baba Nand Singh Ji who had direct access to the court of Akaal Purakh). Then he took hand of each of the three disciples in his hand and gave blessings and said good bye, as if this was going to be their last meeting.

As the day of his departure (from this earth) approached closer Baba Harnam Singh Ji often said to his close companions and devotees, "Now

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[10] Baba Harnam Singh Ji and Baba Nand Singh Ji often communicated telepathically.

is the time for you to get answers to any questions or to get any doubts removed; because I do not have much time left here". Also he often sang Gurbani verses of detachment (Vairag) in such a tone that the listeners felt something stirring deep down in their hearts and many started crying. Then one day he asked his close devotees to leave the Dera after he was gone. He told each individual where he should go and who he should serve. For example, he told Bhai Rattan Singh Daroli and his wife to go to Baba Nand Singh Ji. To some others he asked to go to Sant Bahal Das or Sant Sri Ram Singh. He then sent a messenger to tell Baba Nand Singh Ji that he should take charge of everything[11] and told Sant Narain Singh to stay at the Dera and run it properly.

One morning Baba Nand Singh Ji was sitting in deep meditation in Kaleraan when Baba Harnam Singh Ji sent a telepathic message asking him to come to Bhucho. Baba Nand Singh Ji immediately got up and asked his close devotees to get ready to go to Bhucho. On reaching the Dera at Bhucho Baba Nand Singh Ji and the accompanying devotees went and made their obeisance to Baba Harnam Singh Ji who made Baba Nand Singh Ji sit next to him. He then said, "You have come from a distance and must be tired. Go and have some rest. I would like to see you tomorrow morning at 12:30 AM.

Baba Nand Singh Ji did as he was told. According to his daily routine he got up at 11:30 PM, took shower, said his morning prayers and then went to Baba Harnam Singh Ji. The two holy men were together until 4:30 AM. What was discussed between them, only God or they know. Baba Nand Singh Ji was to depart for Majha in the morning, therefore a large congregation had gathered to have the sight of the two great mystics and to listen to their celestial words.

Baba Harnam Singh Ji started with the subject of transitory nature of the world. He said, "Whoever comes to this world has to depart one day. This is the law of nature which no one can violate. My time of departure is very near now and I am ready for it". Then he addressed Baba Nand Singh Ji and said, "Do not cremate my body but put it in the

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[11] It probably meant all spiritual powers (and not worldly assets) in Baba Harnam Singh Ji's possession; because Baba Nand Singh Ji never took charge of Bhucho Dera. Also if the message meant Bhucho Dera then Baba Harnam Singh Ji would not have sent Bhai Rattan Singh Daroli to Kaleran.

Satluj River. Also do not try to delay my departure by your spiritual power; because this is the will of Akaal Purakh". After some time Baba Nand Singh Ji left for Majha.

A few days after the departure of Baba Nand Singh Ji, one morning Baba Harnam Singh Ji asked his personal attendant Sant Narain Singh, that he would like to take some milk. Sant Narain Singh immediately went to the Langar and prepared the milk the way Baba Ji used to drink. He then came back and requested Baba Ji to come and take the milk. Baba Ji got up to go to where he used to sit and drink milk but after taking only a few steps fell down. He then said to Sant Narain Singh, "It seems that Akaal Purakh does not wish that I drink this milk. He wants me to come to Him".

A few days after this incident one morning Baba Ji said, "Today all devotees should come and give me a bath because this is going to be my last bath". Soon all men and women present at the Dera gathered around Baba Ji and started taking turns in pouring buckets of water on him. At the same time all were reciting Japu Ji. Baba Ji looked very happy that morning. In the evening Baba Ji asked Sant Narain Singh to give him a body- massage. When he touched Baba Ji's body he said, "Baba Ji, your body is hot as if you have a high fever". Baba Ji said, "My time to depart has arrived". The next morning (in the month of December 1927) Baba Ji discarded his body to merge in Akaal Purakh.

Messages were immediately sent to Sant Bahal Das and Pandit Sri Ram Singh who arrived as soon as they received them. A telegram was despatched to Baba Nand Singh Ji (Sardar Khushal Singh who happened to be at Bhucho at that time, knew the whereabouts of Baba Nand Singh Ji in Majha). A large number of devotees started arriving from adjoining towns and villages. Soon a huge crowd converged on the Dera.

That fateful morning Baba Nand Singh Ji was at Partapgarh. He tried to contact Baba Harnam Singh Ji telepathically but did not receive any reply. He immediately suspected that what Baba Harnam Singh Ji had mentioned before he (Baba Nand Singh Ji) left Bhucho, must have happened. He therefore decided to leave for Bhucho. At that time the telegram carrying the news of demise of Baba Ji also arrived.

In Bhucho at that time there were two divergent opinions regarding the disposal of the body of Baba Harnam Singh Ji. One group was of the opinion that any decision must await the arrival of Baba Nand Singh Ji while the other group wanted to cremate the body as soon as possible in order to prevent the decay. Finally the group in favour of immediate cremation won and a pyre was prepared on the mound. Baba Ji's body was placed on the pyre and Sant Bahal Das ignited it. Within a few minutes after the pyre was lit Baba Nand Singh Ji arrived. He was furious because Baba Harnam Singh Ji had specifically said that his body should be disposed off in Satluj River. Also Baba Nand Singh Ji said to those responsible for the decision of cremation, "You are assassins because you have shown fire to Baba Ji who because of his vow did not see fire all his life. Furthermore, he was still alive; because the soul of mystics like Baba Harnam Singh Ji passes through the tenth portal of the body which takes some time. You have put him to fire when his soul was still in the tenth portal". As he said these words there was an explosion in the pyre and cinders flew and scattered around indicating the departure of the soul as described by Baba Nand Singh Ji. The body was still only half burned, therefore the cinders were collected and the pyre relit.

Baba Nand Singh Ji, in spite of requests from the leaders to stay and take over the charge of the Dera, did not stop even for a minute there and immediately departed.

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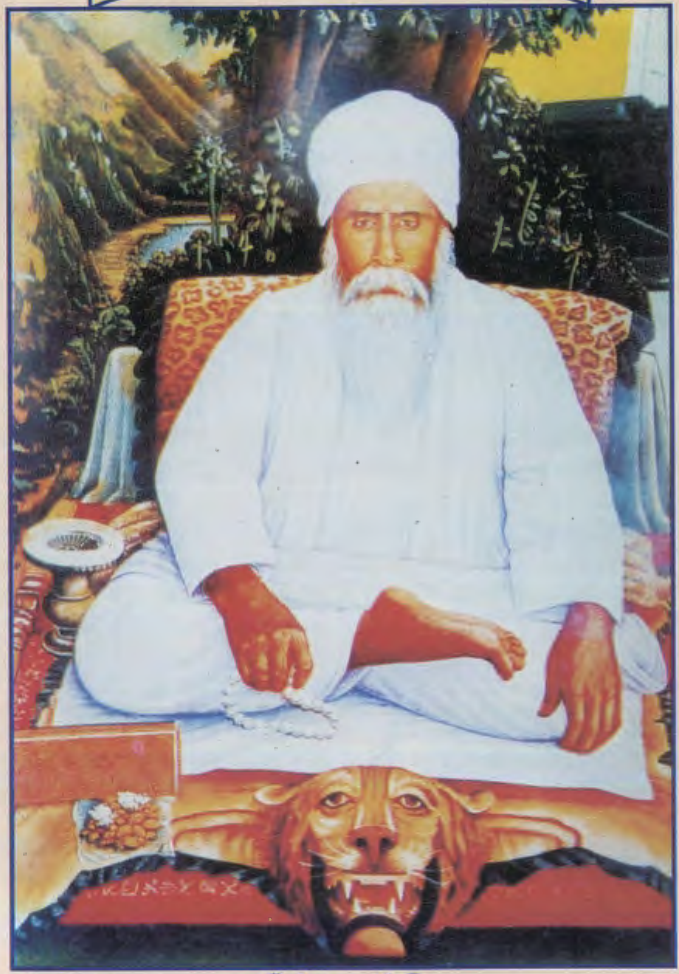

SANT BABA NAND SINGH JI

The life story of Baba Nand Singh Ji (of Kaleraan) is unique and different in many ways from those of most other Sikh mystics and Sants. For example, from the day he decided to lead the life of an ascetic he did not touch money throughout the rest of his life; never saw a woman unless she was accompanied by her husband, father or son and never solicited for funds for any project, howsoever important it might have been.

Nanaksar, the Thaath or Dera of Baba Nand Singh Ji is the only place where even today, over sixty years after his merger into the infinite, *langar* is not cooked nor anyone is asked to bring food although hundreds of *'sevadars'* permanently live there and hundreds (and sometimes thousands) of devotees come there daily. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are brought by devotees using all modes of transportation from far and near. None of the *sevadars* is paid any salary - all are dedicated volunteers[1]. No devotee can bring any cash offerings. Many devotees have contributed hundreds of thousands of rupees for the construction of buildings in the complex but no name of any donour is engraved or displayed in any other way.

Although Nanaksar (Kaleraan) is thought by many as the permanent abode of Baba Nand Singh Ji, and he is known as "Kaleraan Wale", the actual fact is that he spent a major portion of his life travelling to distant areas of Punjab on Guru Nanak's mission.

Among the areas most frequented by Baba Nand Singh Ji, Baagh (Distt. Jhang), Patto-Choonian and some parts of Shivalak hills are worth special mention. To a lesser extent he visited Delhi and the Doon valley. He almost always attended the festival of Baisakhi at Damdama Sahib and from there often went to pay respects to his beloved teacher, Baba Wadhawa Singh Ji at Lehra Khana, from whom he got the education in Gurmat.

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[1] It is sad to mention that some imposters, posing as 'Nanaksar Waale' have recently been caught cheating some gullible devotees of their money and property.

It is amazing that Baba Ji showered his grace on the Sangat of Baagh, an insignificant and obscure little town in a place far away from where he was born and brought up (Sant Sujan Singh Ji, one of his foremost devotees on whom he showered his special blessings belonged to Baagh) According to him some special ties from previous births were responsible for the mutual attraction.

It is appropriate to describe here an episode that occurred during the early part of Baba Nand Singh Ji's life when for about 12 years he was travelling alone to obey the order of his preceptor, Baba Harnam Singh Ji of Bhucho:

> Those days Baba Ji mostly travelled on foot and did not beg for food. Sometimes for several days he did not receive any food. Therefore he was very weak. The day he reached Baagh for the first time, no one knew him in the town. He therefore went to the Gurdwara. On that particular day the son of the Granthi was getting married. Baba Ji asked the Granthi if he could get some water to drink. But the Granthi who was busy entertaining his guests told him to go to the *Kuttiaa* (hermitage) about a mile from the town where he would get water and someone would also bring food for him there. Baba Ji quietly went to the *Kuttiaa* and drank some water from the well but no one brought any food for him because the Granthi forgot to tell anyone that a sant had arrived in the *kuttiaa*. Baba Ji therefore started walking to the nearest railway station that was about four miles from there. However, because of weakness it was very difficult for him to walk by himself. Baba Ji saw that a labourer was also going towards the station. He asked him (the labourer) to give him support. The labourer, thinking that he was a Sant agreed to give support and the two started walking. They had walked only a short distance when the labourer saw bracelet in the wrist of Baba Ji and said, "I thought you were a Sant and that is why I agreed to give you support; but I see you are a Sikh, therefore I will charge you for my labour". When they reached the station the labourer demanded four annas (a quarter of a Rupee). Baba Ji said, "I do not have any money on me, but you should go to Sardar Kahan Singh and he will pay you".

The next day the labourer went to Sardar Kahan Singh, one of the landlords of the town, told him the story of the previous day and

demanded the four annas. Sardar Kahan Singh said, "I do not know who that sant was but it seems he knows me, may be from a previous birth". So saying, he paid him the money.

The whole Sikh population and a sizeable Hindu population of Baagh and Maghiana area got attracted to Baba Ji like a swarm of bumble bees to a lotus flower. The same was the case with other areas he often visited. Some of his close devotees came from distant places like Delhi, Baagh, Choonia, Padhaur, Kaleraan and Jhoraran. How they got close to Baba Ji is hard to explain. Baba Ji showered his love (and sometimes angry rebukes) on these individuals probably to teach them humility and devotion to Guru Nanak. Many of them came on every 'Pooranmashi' (the full moon night) wherever Baba Ji was, to attend the large congregational gatherings; because Baba Ji celebrated every Pooranmashi as if it was the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev Ji. At times Baba Ji's entourage exceeded a hundred persons including Ragis, *Sevadars* and devotees. They travelled long distances but no one was solicited to give a car or another mean of transportation. Eager devotees to render such *'seva'* were always larger in number than needed.

Wherever he went he took Guru Granth Sahib along with him. To Guru Granth Sahib he accorded utmost respect as he would to Guru Nanak. He believed that Guru Granth Sahib was a living Guru and with unshakeable faith, one could actually see the vision of Guru Nanak through it. Not only he proved it to himself but also made several close devotees of his also have Guru Nanak's vision from Guru Granth Sahib. Before eating he always presented the food to Guru Granth Sahib for actually partaking it.

Baba Ji believed that all boons could be attained by recitation of Gurbani with faith and devotion. He had devised a novel method to spread the urge to recite Guru Granth Sahib among all who came to him. To those who could not read (do the *paath*) Guru Granth Sahib he said, "If you recite Sukhmani Sahib 50 times or Japu Ji Sahib 250 times or complete six rosaries (108 Beads) daily of the Mool Mantra (up to 'hosee bhee sach') for a month then it will be equivalent to completing a full recitation of Guru Granth Sahib. In every Pooranmashi congregational meeting the devotees pledged to complete thousands of *paaths* of Guru Granth Sahib this way.

In the Malwa tract of Punjab, about three miles from the town of Jagraon, in the Ludhiana district, there is an old village called Sherpur Kalaan. In this village, in the second half of nineteenth century there lived about three hundred families. Among them about twenty five families were those of artisans (Ramgarhias) and a dozen or so families of Jats who could be counted as Sikhs; because the remaining non-Muslim families (over one hundred or so) believed in Sakhi Sarvar. Bhai Jai Singh and Mata Sada Kaur's family was one among the families of Ramgarhias who were blessed with the gift of Sikhi although Bhai Jai Singh was a simple and open-minded person who professed to be a Sikh but without much knowledge about the teachings of the Gurus. He was an accomplished carpenter and also owned a small piece of land which he farmed and the family thus lived comfortably. Mata Sada Kaur belonged to a highly devoted Sikh family and was an ideal home maker. She gave birth to four sons, Bhai Santa Singh, Bhai Bhagat Singh, Bhai Jagat Singh and the youngest Bhai Nand Singh, who turned out to be a great Sikh Mystic.

Bhai Nand Singh was born in 1881[2] (at 3:00 AM). That morning the grand father, Bhai Anoop Singh, who owned some sheep, went to milk them. To his surprise the sheep gave milk that was several-fold the regular amount that he could get daily. He came and said, "The sudden increase in the amount of milk and the birth of a baby boy indicate good fortune. The new comer must be a very blessed soul who has sanctified our house and enhanced our fortunes".

Being the youngest son, baby Nand Singh was the sweetheart of his mother. He also had such a magnetic attraction that many young girls of neighbourhood would come and take turns in picking him up for hours together. The name of Bibi Khemo, the next door neighbour, who was ten or eleven years old at that time, is especially noteworthy. She took care of baby Nand Singh like her own brother. Thus this celestial baby was brought up with tender love and care.

There was neither a school nor a Gurdwara in this village and the

nearest town, Jagraon, that had a school, was too far for a five year old boy to walk to every day. Therefore young Bhai Nand Singh got no formal education but learned the ancestral trade of carpentry from his father and elder brothers.

Bhai Bhagat Singh, one of the brothers of Bhai Nand Singh had received some education. He could read and write Gurmukhi and Urdu and also had some knowledge of Persian. He also had leaning towards Sikhi and was instrumental in spreading Guru Nanak's word among the Sikh families of the village who had neither the knowledge nor the aptitude to learn by themselves the tenets of Sikhism. Every evening after dinner the whole family of Bhai Jai Singh along with some neighbour families gathered around him and in the light of an earthen oil lamp he read from Guru Nanak's Janam Sakhi (biography) or Suraj Prakash (a large book containing poetic description of the lives of all the Sikh Gurus).

When Bhai Nand Singh was about five years old, one night while Bhai Bhagat Singh was reading from the Janam Sakhi, the story of Bhai Boorha came. In this story a young shepherd name Boorha met Guru Nanak Dev and told the Guru about his daily observation that while starting a fire the small pieces of wood always caught fire and got burnt first while the larger pieces took some time to start burning. He said that from this observation he had inferred that the death could come to younger human beings before it would strike the older ones. Guru Nanak then said, "You are young but talk like an old person". In Punjabi the word for 'old' is 'Buddha'. From that day this young boy was called 'Baba Buddha'. He turned out to be one of the foremost Sikhs who was responsible for fixing the sacred mark of Guruship on the forehead of five successors of Guru Nanak. This story had a deep effect on the mind of young Nand Singh. He thought that he was the youngest of all brothers. Who knew the death might strike him first. He therefore decided to dedicate whatever life he was left with, in the service of Guru Granth Sahib.

One day he thought to himself, "When I am awake I keep the image of Guru Granth Sahib in my mind. But when I sleep I forget the Guru". Therefore he decided not to sleep at all. To do so he started leaving his house after everyone had gone to bed. He then went to a well outside the village and sat at its edge. The fear of falling in the deep well kept

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[2] The month and date have not been definitely verified although some writers think he was born on the full moon night of the Bikrami calendar month of Kartik. During the early period of British Raj in Punjab the record keeping of births and deaths was very poor or even non-existent.

him from sleeping and he could thus meditate on Guru Granth Sahib all night. This routine, however, could go on only for a few days because the parents and brothers noticed his tired eyes and deteriorating health. One night one of the brothers followed him stealthily and caught him while he was sitting on the edge of the well. Bhai Bhagat then explained to him that if before going to bed he meditated on Guru Granth Sahib and the Mool Mantra, then even while he slept he would be meditating on Guru Granth Sahib. Young Nand Singh made this as his daily routine. He developed such devotion to Guru Granth Sahib that he even considered that turning one's back to where Guru Granth Sahib was installed was disrespect to the Guru.

One morning when he went to the fields with breakfast for his brother who was working there, the brother asked him to tend to the plough for some time so he could take his breakfast. Young Nand Singh held the plough and started walking behind the bullocks. When the bullocks reached the end of the field, instead of turning them around Nand Singh stopped the plough. When the brother asked him the reason for stopping he said, "If I walk in this direction then I will have my back to Guru Granth Sahib (he pointed to where he knew Guru Granth Sahib was installed)". The brother immediately understood that his youngest brother was not an ordinary boy. He had Divine writ stamped on his forehead. That was the reason why he seldom involved himself in playing games with his playmates and spent most of his time in contemplation of Guru Granth Sahib.

The financial condition of the family was such that slowly all the land had to be mortgaged[3] in order to make both ends meet. As a result young Bhai Nand Singh had to learn his ancestral trade of carpentry and bricklaying. By the time he was fourteen years of age he started accompanying one of his elder brothers to different towns in pursuit of work.

Bhai Santa Singh, the elder brother of Bhai Nand Singh also got the job of an orderly in the department of canals and was posted in the village Tinddaanwaali. After a few years he asked Bhai Nand Singh to

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[3] The land remained mortgaged until 1953 (long after the death of Baba Nand Singh Ji) when Sant Sujan Singh Ji paid off the debt and had it returned to Bhai Sher Singh, the nephew of Baba Nand Singh Ji.

come to Tinddaanwaali where there was plenty of work for him and Bhai Nand Singh moved there. He was about twenty years old at that time. There he started spending more time in meditation than in work. However, he did not stay there for too long and returned to Sherpura and then started working in Jagraon which had developed into a good market as a result of construction of Ludhiana - Ferozepur railway line.

Every morning before going to his work, Bhai Nand Singh went to the local Gurdwara to receive the blessings of Guru Granth Sahib. He reached his work before everyone else and left after everyone else had gone. If on a particular day, for some reason, he got late to work then he worked overtime in order to put in the required number of hours. He did not waste time in gossip with other artisans but kept on reciting the Mool Mantra while he was working. The quality of his work was superior to most of his colleagues. Because of his honesty and superior quality of work he was always in demand.

Whatever he earned he gave a small portion out of it to his elder brother and the remaining he spent on poor people. He addressed everyone respectfully and as a result all his co-workers addressed him by his full name, something very unusual in villages where everyone calls everyone else by a shortened name. He wore clothes made up of rough cotton material which he always kept neat and clean.

Being the youngest child he was very dear to his mother who took extra care to feed him properly. Bhai Nand Singh also had great respect for his mother. Often he helped her while she was doing a difficult domestic chore like grinding grain at the hand mill in the house.

In Sherpura village there was no Gurdwara; but a naked *Sadhu* who lived in a shack outside the village kept a volume of Guru Granth Sahib and advised all villagers to come and bow before Guru Granth Sahib before starting their work in the morning.

One day Bhai Nand Singh asked the *Sadhu* several questions on where God is and how one could find him? The Sadhu said, "Sri Guru Granth Sahib contains God's word and one should search Guru Granth Sahib in order to reach Him. On further questioning by Bhai Nand Singh the Sadhu said, "Young man, you seem to have a discerning intellect. You are asking me questions that are beyond my comprehension. If you want answers to all your questions then you should go to Hazoor Sahib where the spiritual power of the tenth Master, Guru Gobind Singh Ji resides". These words of the *sadhu* got engraved on Bhai Nand Singh's heart.

The town of 'Sidhwaan Khurd' is located at a distance of about four miles from Sherpura. (Hakeem) Bhai Jawahar Singh and Narain Singh were big land owners there. They were extremely devoted Gursikhs and were always happy to do *seva* to any roaming holy men (Sants) that came to their town. They had got a large room constructed in one of their gardens where any roaming ascetics that passed through the town stayed. The food to these Sants was served by the family of Bhai Jawahar Singh. The love and humility with which this family served the Sants attracted many such groups to visit this town. Almost always one could find a group of Sants staying there. These groups held congregational meetings daily in the evening in which they gave Gurbani discourses and preached Sikh history and philosophy sprinkled generously with Hindu mythological stories and Vedantic philosophy. Whenever a group of Sants was holding congregational meetings, Bhai Nand Singh always made a point to attend them. This involved walking to Jagraon for work from Sherpura in the morning, going back in the evening then walking to Sidhwaan and again walking back to Sherpura late in the evening. Too much exertion and lack of nourishing food soon told upon Bhai Nand Singh's health. One day Bhai Narain Singh, who knew Bhai Nand Singh and had been watching him for some time, said to him, "I can see that you have a strong leaning towards spiritual pursuit. Looking at your deteriorating health I must advise that you have to either continue working or pursue the path of spirituality". The very next day Bhai Nand Singh left all his tools at the house of Harnam Singh, where he was doing some carpenter's job, bade good bye to the lady of the house and left for home. This happened in 1903.

God's ways of doing things are strange. Within a few days of this incident (with Bhai Narain Singh), Bhai Bhagat Singh, the elder brother of Bhai Nand Singh suddenly fell sick and in a few days passed away. The family started thinking of getting his widowed wife wedded to Bhai Nand Singh, who somehow came to know of this. This was the last straw. One morning he left home without telling anyone.

After leaving home Bhai Nand Singh went to Amritsar. Since he had

no money on him he started working as a labourer. But he worked only for a few hours to earn enough money to pay for his meagre food requirement. The rest of the time he spent in the Parikarma of Harimandir Sahib meditating and reciting Naam. Then gradually he started decreasing the time he worked so that he could devote more time to meditation. As a result he earned too little to feed himself properly and became very week. He therefore decided to start begging.

The next morning Bhai Nand Singh went to a village in the outskirts of Amritsar to beg for food. He knocked at the door of a farmer and said aloud, "I am hungry, please give me some food (obviously, he did not know how to beg)". The farmer's wife, who had just started baking *rotis* (Indian bread), said, "You will have to wait; because I have to first feed my husband who has to go to work in the fields". The farmer who was sitting in the kitchen, said to his wife, "Give him a *roti*, after all he is a beggar; and begging is said to be equivalent to dying". When Bhai Nand Singh heard these words he instantaneously decided that dying of hunger was better than living the miserable life of begging. He started walking away from the farmer's house. The farmer's wife ran after him saying, "Please wait and have food". But Bhai Nand Singh said, "I am nor yet dead". Saying so he left the village and again started working in Amritsar to feed himself.

Now Bhai Nand Singh made up his mind to go on a pilgrimage of Hazoor Sahib. However, he found out that one needed at least one hundred rupees as travel expenses to go on such a long journey. While he was thinking of ways to save that much money he heard that the Government was opening an army cantonment at Roorkee where many Sikh regiments were to be stationed. He therefore reached Roorkee and got himself enlisted in the army as the assistant to the Granthi of the Gurdwara attached to a Sikh regiment. Now his daily routine was to get up very early in the morning and after taking bath sit down in meditation. Then he cleaned the Gurdwara hall before the Granthi came to install Guru Granth Sahib for the morning congregational meeting. The Granthi was very pleased with the sincere *seva* (service) and humble demeanour of Bhai Nand Singh. Everyone else also appreciated the upkeep of the Gurdwara. Bhai Nand Singh saved most of his salary, gave it to the Granthi and told him to return it when the total reached one hundred rupees because he needed that much money to reach Hazoor Sahib. The day the Granthi gave him one hundred rupees, the same day he quit his job and started for Hazoor Sahib.

On reaching Hazoor Sahib Bhai Nand Singh started spending most of his time meditating in front of the sanctum sanctorium (Sach Khand). Pretty soon the head priest, Baba Heera Singh noticed this youngman who sat for hours in meditation. One day he came to Bhai Nand Singh and asked him where he was from and what was the objective in his life? Bhai Nand Singh humbly replied that he would consider himself extremely fortunate if he could get some *seva* of Sach Khand. Baba Heera Singh said, "I can give you the *seva* that you are asking for; however, first you will have to take Khande di Pahul (Amrit)". Bhai Nand Singh immediately agreed and took the Khande di Pahul. Baba Heera Singh then said, "The *seva* that you are being given is extremely difficult. You will have to bring several pitchers of water at midnight from the River Godavari (about ¾ mile away) to wash the floor of the Sach Khand". Bhai Nand Singh accepted this with great joy and carried it out for one full year with exemplary devotion. His spiritual state progressed so much that during this period he is said to have had Darshan (vision) of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh.

According to his own account, one day he was sleeping when he felt that someone was asking him to get up and get some education. When he asked where he should go to achieve this purpose, the answer came, "Go to Guru Ki Kaashi (Damdama Sahib)". The next morning he made up his mind to go to Damdama Sahib and within a few days he was on a train that took him to Bathinda from where he then went to Damdama Sahib. However, he stayed there only for a few days. During this period he noticed that those incharge of the Deras there were jealous of one another and had always their own interests in mind rather than the well-being of the disciples. No one cared for the devotees either. As a result Sant Nand Singh Ji could not even get a square meal at the so called Langars and had to fill his belly by eating leaves and roots of the bushes.

While at Damdama Sahib he heard that at Lehra Khana, a town about 20 miles from there, Baba Wadhawa Singh, who was a very pious and learned person, had a Dera where many students from all over Punjab came to learn Gurbani meanings and Sikh history and philosophy. He left

Damdama Sahib and went to Lehra Khana where Baba Wadhawa Singh, without asking any questions, allowed him to stay and do *seva* at the Dera. Sant Nand Singh Ji started living there and took over the *seva* given to him with great enthusiasm. Within a few days all the disciples at the Dera started talking about this new comer who never talked to anyone but kept himself busy in either *seva* or meditation. After a few days Baba Wadhawa Singh called Sant Nand Singh and asked him the purpose for which he had come there. Sant Ji said, "Sir, I am here to learn Gurbani meanings and Guru Nanak's philosophy, and would be grateful if you would kindly accept me as one of your disciples". Hearing such words of humility Baba Wadhawa Singh started looking at this unusual student. Then he suddenly recalled the prediction made, a few years back by an astrologer who had said, "A blessed soul will come to you as a student who will not only make you famous throughout the Sikh world but will also be the cause of your emancipation". Baba Wadhawa Singh said, "I do not think that I am capable of teaching you. However, if you insist then I will try to fulfil the traditional duty of a teacher". Thus the teaching lessons started. Within a very short time Sant Nand Singh Ji could fluently read Guru Granth Sahib. He also learned the meanings of some very difficult passages of Gurbani. Because of this amazing progress in studies and the immaculate character of Sant Ji, Baba Wadhawa Singh started addressing him as "Rikhi Ji", which means 'a sage'.

Baba Wadhawa Singh soon got convinced of the very high spiritual level of Sant Nand Singh Ji. He realized that only a supreme mystic like Baba Harnam Singh Ji of Bhucho could impart any further spiritual training to him. With this thought in mind he took Sant Nand Singh Ji to Bhucho. On reaching there when they sent the word of their arrival to Baba Harnam Singh Ji, he immediately called them in and said to Baba Wadhawa Singh, "It is good that you have brought my man, for whom I have been waiting for some time. Now you do not worry, I will take good care of him". Baba Wadhawa Singh then took permission and left for Lehra Khana[4].

Baba Harnam Singh Ji then addressed Sant Nand Singh Ji, gave him a 'shabad' and said, "Recite this shabad and meditate on it in solitude and come here once a day". Sant Nand Singh Ji humbly bowed and left. He went into wilderness at some distance from the Dera and got himself immersed in the Shabad. Within a short time he felt that he had control over occult powers. He then went to Baba Harnam Singh Ji and said, "Sir, as a result of meditation on the shabad given by you I have felt that occult powers are now under my control. However, I have no use of these powers". Baba Ji said, "What do you really want"? Sant Ji said, "If you please, I want to have 'Darshan' of Guru Nanak Dev Ji". Baba Ji said, "In that case you have to meditate on the Mool Mantra[5] for forty days and nights. It is a very difficult task but the reward is equally great". Saying so, he took sant ji's hand in his own hand and asked him to repeat 1300 times "I am yours". Sant Ji did as he was told and then left Bhucho.

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[4] This story has also been given in the biography of Baba Harnam Singh Ji.

For forty days and nights he meditated on the Mool Mantra in the wilderness at some distance from Bhucho. Once a day he came to the Dera where he received one roti left over from previous night. He ate this (without any vegetable etc.), drank water and returned to his place of meditation. The description of those forty days, as he himself recalled later, is given below:

> "In the beginning I faced great difficulty in controlling my mind which kept on straying away and thus making it extremely difficult to focus on the Mool Mantra. When I complained to Baba Harnam Singh Ji, he said that such a situation was not uncommon. It actually indicated that the seeker was on the correct path and encouraged me to continue with meditation. Soon afterwards the mind stopped wandering and the state of equipoise was achieved which is the most enjoyable state a human being can experience" (What ultimately happened, he kept to himself).

When after forty days Sant Nand Singh Ji went to Baba Harnam Singh Ji, he said, "Now you are independent. Go and spread the word of Guru Nanak among masses". Sant Ji bowed and left.

For several years (twelve years according to some estimates) Sant Nand Singh Ji went around in various parts of Punjab spreading the word of Guru Nanak. He always stayed outside the town in the wilderness and

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[5] The Mool Mantra given by Baba Ji was:

ੴ ਸਤਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਕਰਤਾ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਨਿਰਭਉ ਨਿਰਵੈਰੁ ਅਕਾਲ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਅਜੂਨੀ ਸੈਭੰ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥
॥ ਜਪੁ ॥
ਆਦਿ ਸਚੁ ਜੁਗਾਦਿ ਸਚੁ ॥ ਹੈ ਭੀ ਸਚੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਹੋਸੀ ਭੀ ਸਚੁ ॥ ੧ ॥

never went with a begging bowl for obtaining food. If someone brought some food he took only a small portion and returned the rest; otherwise he lived on leaves, roots and fruit of wild bushes. However, within a few days of stay at a place many people always started coming to listen to his celestial sermons based on Gurbani with emphasis on *nimrata* (humility), considering and respecting Guru Granth Sahib as the living embodiment of the ten Gurus and taking *khande di pauhul*. During this period he travelled to far off areas of Punjab where he repeatedly went later on also.

One of the most significant places where Baba Nand Singh Ji went during this period was Baagh (District Jhang). Within a couple of days many devotees started coming to where he chose to stay in the wilderness. They took turns in bringing food which Baba Ji accepted if prepared while the devotee was reciting Japu Ji. Also before taking the food he always supplicated before Guru Granth Sahib to taste it. An amazing event occurred here that indicates that Guru Nanak actually tasted the food.

Sardar Gian Singh, one of the richest landlords of the town had his turn to bring food for Baba Ji. He was known to be one of the best cooks in the town because he was very fond of good food and loved to prepare various dishes himself the way he liked. He prepared the food as was told by Baba Ji and brought with great devotion. Baba Ji took the food and went inside the room where Guru Granth Sahib was installed. After some time he came out and said, "Gian Singh, your food has not been accepted by Guru Nanak, he has refused to taste it". Gian Singh started crying and said that he had observed all the precautions in preparing the food. Baba Ji asked if someone had tasted any of the preparations before the food was brought. Gian Singh said, "Yes sir, I had to taste if salt and pepper were at optimum level". Baba Ji said, "Guru Nanak is particular about the devotion of the devotee and not how the food tastes". Gian Singh begged to be forgiven and requested for another chance to which Baba Ji agreed. Gian Singh went home, prepared the flour himself on a handmill after cleaning the wheat. Then he prepared the food while reciting Japu Ji all the time. Next day he took the food to Baba Ji who took it to the room of Guru Granth Sahib. Today he took a long time coming out. When, however, he came out he was extremely happy. He said, "Today Guru

Nanak ate to his satisfaction, he was very pleased because all the dishes were so delicious".

One thing during all these travels, however, always bothered Sant Nand Singh Ji that he never asked nor received the most precious gift of spirituality from Baba Harnam Singh Ji. He therefore decided to go back to Bhucho to request Baba Ji to bestow upon him the great gift[6].

The morning Sant Nand Singh Ji reached Bhucho a couple of devotee ladies were sitting in the presence of Baba Harnam Singh Ji. Suddenly Baba Ji said to them, "Leave at once because an angry Sant is arriving here soon". The ladies left and soon afterwards Sant Nand Singh Ji walked in the room without taking permission from the personal *sevadar* of Baba Ji. As he entered the room, Baba Ji said, "What brings you here Nand Singh[7]"? Sant Ji said, "For twelve years I have been roaming around in the country trying to follow your orders to the best of my capacity and ability. Now I have come to receive the most precious item that you possess". Baba Harnam Singh Ji said, "What will you do if I refuse to give it to you"? Sant Ji said, "I will commit suicide by jumping in the well". Baba Ji said, "Then go ahead and do so". Sant Ji immediately turned and started for the nearest well. Baba Ji sent an attendant after him to bring him back. When Sant Nand Singh Ji came back, Baba Ji took his hand in his own hand and asked him to recite three times, "I am yours". As sant Ji recited these words, Baba Ji pressed his hand, gave him a push and said, "Now go". Sant Ji started walking as if he was in a trans. Baba Ji said to one of his attendants, "Follow Sant Ji to where he goes and sits down. Then wait and bring him back when he comes to himself".

When Sant Ji returned, Baba Ji said, "Now you have been bestowed upon unlimited celestial powers of *Akaal Purakh* which are inexhaustible. You can conquer any human faculty you wish". After some time Baba Ji asked Baba Nand Singh Ji to go to the Majha tract and preach there. He then added, "Wherever you go Akaal Purakh will be with you". Baba Nand Singh Ji bowed and left for Majha.

After spending some time in the Majha area Baba Nand Singh Ji seems to have gone to Harappa and from there kept on travelling in the South-western part of Punjab (now in Pakistan) for some time. He then went probably for a day or two to Bhucho to pay homage to his teacher Baba Harnam Singh Ji. All through this period he travelled alone, and mostly on foot. From Bhucho he went towards Bhadaur, a famous town in the (erstwhile) state of Patiala in April of 1918.

A couple of miles from this town there was a small jungle in the middle of which was a large old building where groups of roaming ascetics usually stayed. The Sardar family of Bhadaur usually took care of providing food to these ascetics whenever information about their arrival reached them. Baba Ji also stayed in this building but because he was alone, no one noticed his arrival and therefore no food was sent from the town. Everyday Baba Ji sat in deep meditation from dawn to dusk. Some young boys from an adjoining village who were grazing their cattle noticed that a Sant had been sitting at the same spot for several days even in the hot sun. According to Baba Ji himself, "I sat there for about three weeks. There were several bushes of wild capers around the place. Whenever I felt hungry I took some fruit from these bushes, drank a little water out of my metallic pitcher and continued in meditation".

When the young cattle-herders mentioned about this unusual Sant in their village the news gradually reached the ears of Bhai Parsa Singh who was a devoted Gursikh and was always ready to do service to any holy person. He was also a poet and was therefore known as 'Kaveeshar'. He took some food and reached where the boys had said that the Sant had been sitting. He saw that Baba Ji was in deep meditation. He bowed in reverence and sat down. After some time Baba Ji opened his eyes and asked Parsa Singh who he was and why was he there. Parsa Singh said, "Sir, the cattle-herder boys told about your presence here and I have brought some food for you". Baba Ji said, "I am fine here eating the fruit of these bushes. You should go and give this food to those labourers who are working these days in the harvesting of wheat crop". Parsa Singh was surprised at the detachment of Baba Ji and humbly requested him to take the food. Baba Ji took some food and then said, "You should now leave but you must spend daily some time in the recitation of Gurbani and the Mool Mantra".

Bhai Parsa Singh went and told his friend, Sardar Nanak Singh, who was the head Sardar of Bhadaur, about this Sant and praised his calm and content nature. Sardar Nanak Singh was sick and could not himself go to Baba Ji, but sent his wife and sister who took food with them and served it to Baba Ji with devotion and humility. In the meantime the word had got around and Sardar Karam Singh Zaildar of the adjoining village Nainwal also came. On seeing and talking to Baba Ji he was so much impressed with his personality that he insisted and took him to his village where he arranged for a comfortable place where Baba Ji stayed for about two months. In the mean time Sardar Gurbachan Singh of Bhadaur, who was a college student, came home during summer vacation. When he heard about Baba Ji he started coming and bringing oil to give body-massage to Baba Ji.

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[6] Only a mystic knows what this gift is.

[7] He actually used the word "Nandu".

It is interesting to note here that when Sardars from Bhadaur went to Bhucho (they were devotees of Baba Harnam Singh Ji) Baba Ji refused to see them saying, "For three weeks I was in Bhadaur but you did not even care to see if I was having even a proper meal". When they humbly requested to know when they committed such an incredible mistake, Baba Ji said, "There is no difference between Baba Nand Singh and I. You completely ignored his presence; I am therefore very unhappy with you". The Sardars begged to be forgiven and later on became devotees of Baba Nand Singh Ji.

At a couple of miles from Sherpura, in the middle of a cemetery, there was a mound. Baba Ji once came and stayed there. Many local devotees came and warned that the place was haunted because there was a grave of a "Naugaza"[8] nearby. Also a wolf was rumoured to live in the bushes on the mound. But Baba Ji did not heed these warnings and spent the night there. The next morning when people came to see what had happened to Baba Ji, they saw him sitting in meditation and at some distance the carcass of a dead wolf was lying. Baba Ji then got a small hut constructed and stayed there for some days.

One day Baba Nand Singh Ji asked Bhai Rattan Singh, who was one of his foremost devotees from Jagraon, to suggest some place that was far from any village, without an easy approach, so that he could pass his time in meditation without any disturbance and worldly alarms. Bhai

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[8] There is a legend about the so called 'Naugazas', who must be very tall Muslim Faqirs. Their graves are located around several Punjab villages. They are associated with super-natural powers and many people worship them.

Rattan Singh after consulting leading persons who knew the area, suggested several places but Baba Ji rejected all of them on some pretext. Finally they took him to where the present 'Thaath' (Nanaksar Dera) is located. Here for miles together the land was barren and infested with snakes. One could see flocks of deer during the day time and hear howling of jackals and wolves at night. Baba Ji liked the place as soon as he saw it and picked a spot for meditation. Near this spot there was an old abandoned well whose water was dirty and bitter in taste. Baba Ji, however, said, "Remove enough old water so that the fresh sweet water seeps in". Soon good potable water came to the surface which pleased Baba Ji immensely. A small hut was then constructed that offered some shelter from dust storms and rain and Baba Ji made his abode in the hut. Because of availability of potable water, some young 'Gujjar' boys who used to graze their cattle in the adjoining area started coming to Baba Ji and listen to his spiritual discourses.

Famous Sikh preacher, Sant Giani Sunder Singh of Bhinder had started a chain of 101 Akhand Paaths of Guru Granth Sahib in his village (Bhinder). On the conclusion of 101st paath he had invited many Sikh scholars and famous Ragis and Sants from all over Punjab. He had a great regard for Baba Nand Singh Ji because for some time he and Baba Ji were together at Lehra Khana as disciples of Baba Wadhawa Singh Ji. He sent two of his leading disciples to Baba Nand Singh Ji with invitation to come and attend the function. Baba Ji, however, declined saying that he felt uneasy where there was a crowd. When Sant Giani Sunder Singh received this reply, he immediately stood up in supplication and requested Guru Granth Sahib to have Baba Nand Singh's mind changed so that he attends the function. The next day Baba Nand Singh Ji called some of his devotees who were planning to attend this function and said, "Sant Giani Sunder Singh Ji has requested Guru Granth Sahib to make me attend the function and the Guru has given approval. Therefore I must also go with you".

On reaching Bhinder Baba Ji was accorded a warm welcome and given great respect. He was offered a place of honour in the function. On the day of conclusion, however, on an advice from some of his followers, Giani Ji started appealing for money to build a school. Baba Ji never believed in making appeals for money. He believed that if one had full faith in Akaal Purakh, money was never a problem. Also Giani Ji said something that indicated lack of unshakeable faith in the Guru. Baba Ji left the place saying, "Although Giani Ji is like my brother because we are the students of the same teacher; there is a difference in our perception and devotion to the Guru".

Dhudhike is a small village in Moga tehsil of Ferozepur district. Once Baba Ji went there and sat down under a tree at the bank of a pond that was empty because it had not rained for some time. Some villagers saw him sitting there and came for obeisance and were very impressed by the personality and words of Baba Ji. Soon the number of devotees increased considerably and one of them took upon himself to bring food for Baba Ji every evening. Late one evening a severe dust storm blew which was followed by a very heavy hail storm and rain. The devotee, as a result, could not bring food that evening. All night it rained heavily accompanied by large hails. The next morning the villagers thought that Sant Ji must have perished in such a storm because there was no shelter around. A number of villagers even got together and started preparing for the cremation in case the unfortunate event had happened. On reaching near they saw Baba Ji walking on the bank of the pond which was now full of water. When one of the villagers asked Baba Ji how he had passed the night, he said that Guru Gobind Singh had kindly provided him with shelter.

From Dhudhike Baba Ji went to Damdama Sahib to attend the festival of Baisakhi. Every year thousands of Preachers, Ragis and learned Sants and Mystics came to attend this festival and a very large number of devotees, specially, from the Malwa tract of Punjab came to enjoy Keertan and Gurbani discourses. Several meetings were held in which many learned gianis and pundits held philosophical discussions on various subjects of Gurbani. In one such meeting a pundit egoistically boasted about his superior knowledge. Baba Ji is said to have asked this learned pandit, what kind of bliss Guru Nanak Dev Ji has described in the 36th stanza of Japu Ji where he says:

ਤਿਥੈ ਨਾਦ ਬਿਨੋਦ ਕੋਡ ਅਨੰਦੁ ॥

When the pandit could not give a satisfactory answer, Baba Ji

explained to him. He was satisfied and humbly asked to be forgiven for his ego.

After Baisakhi, Baba Ji along with five of his devotees left Damdama Sahib for Bhucho. On the way they met some bullock carts in which there were about 50 women and children who were also returning from the Baisakhi fair. Suddenly a severe dust storm started blowing. The visibility became so low that one could not see the path beyond a few yards. At that time a dozen or so miscreants who were drunk and had all kinds of weapons on them started going around the carts with the intention of robbing the women of their cash and jewellery. Baba Ji said to his companions, "Follow the bunch of ruffians and keep the carts moving, Guru Gobind Singh will protect these innocent women and children". The devotees followed the advice and the miscreants could not muster courage to attack. Soon the village Kahn Singh Wala arrived which was the destination of the women. The ruffians then took to their heels. The villagers profusely thanked Baba Ji and requested him to stay there for some time. But Baba Ji declined the offer and kept on moving towards Bhucho where he reached early in the morning and met Baba Harnam Singh Ji. He stayed there for a fortnight and it is said that during this period he received the "certificate of acceptance" in Akaal Purakh's court from Baba Harnam Singh Ji.

On leaving Bhucho Baba Ji had short stops at Bhadaur and Majha tract and then proceeded to Baagh (district Jhang, now in Pakistan). Here Baba Ji stayed in a temporary hermitage near a mound that was located in the middle of Baagh and Maghiana (three miles from each town). Devotees from Baagh were in the forefront of Baba Ji's *seva* and because of their devotion Baba Ji stayed there for two years. Bhai Gian Singh and Bhai Jiwan Singh usually came to do the keertan. They were sons of Sardar Mehtab Singh, a factory owner and landlord of Baagh[9] and had learned music as a hobby. Sometime Bhai Kalu Singh and Bhai Lal Singh also came from Maghiana to do the Keertan. Every evening Bhai Uttam Singh Juneja, a shopkeeper from Baagh did Katha (reading from the Faridkot translation of Guru Granth Sahib). Bhai Makhan Singh, a descendent of Baba Bhagat Singh Ji, the famous self-less devotee and incharge of horse stable of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, became a devotee of Baba Ji. He used to live at Nanaksar, a hamlet at a distance of over four miles from the *Kuttiaa* (hermitage). Every morning he covered this distance on foot and brought food prepared according to the procedure prescribed by Baba Ji. His wife, who was equally devoted, cleaned the grain, made flour on a hand-mill and then prepared *rotis* reciting 'Waheguru' all the time.

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[9] Sant Sujan Singh Ji was the son of Bhai Gian Singh and the author of this book is the son of Bhai Jiwan Singh.

When Baba Ji had stayed at Baagh for about two years, some devotees from Kaleraan came and requested him to come back. Baba Ji said, "My staying at a place or leaving it for any other place is entirely in the hands of Akaal Purakh". The devotees returned in disappointment. But on returning to Kaleraan they had a big congregational meeting in which they humbly supplicated to Akaal Purakh to bring Baba Ji back.

One morning suddenly Baba Ji asked his personal attendant, Bhai Uttam Singh, to request Guru Granth Sahib's guidance whether to stay at Baagh or leave for Kaleraan[10]. When this was done the order came to go to Malwa (Kaleraan). Immediately Baba Ji started for Kaleraan. But before leaving, as was his routine, he ordered the Kuttiya demolished.

On reaching Jagraon railway station, instead of going to Nanaksar, Baba Ji went to the well of Anant Ram Lotia which is located on the way to village Dalla and intended to stay there for some time. Two new devotees came there to join Baba Ji's entourage and stayed with him for the rest of their lives. One, Bhai Rattan Singh of Daroli village who was a close devotee of Baba Harnam Singh Ji of Bhucho, came on an order from him[11]. The second person was Bhai Hazoora Singh who was in the Indian army. After leaving the army service he came to Baba Ji and worked at the Thaath as incharge of the Langar for the rest of his life.

After a few weeks Baba Ji departed for Damdama Sahib to celebrate the festival of Baisakhi there. This time, however, his stay at Damdama Sahib was only for one day. The next morning after taking a bath in the holy sarovar he attended the congregation meeting and in the evening went to Lehra Khana to see his teacher, Baba Wadhawa Singh Ji, who was immensely pleased to see the spiritual progress of his old student.

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[10] Baba Ji had a novel way of obtaining guidance from Guru Granth Sahib. The two or more alternatives of any question were each written on a small piece of paper. These pieces were then rolled into tiny balls and after supplication slid on the 'Rumala' hanging in front of Guru Granth Sahib. The ball which slid the farthest was opened and its content was taken to be the command of Guru Granth Sahib.

[11] This story has been given in the biography of Baba Harnam Singh Ji also.

On arriving at Nanaksar from Lehra Khana Baba Ji expressed that he wanted to set up a daily procedure that would, if followed, lead one to attain respect in the court of Akaal Purakh. The first step towards the execution of this plan was to construct some mud huts and then set up a programme of Gurbani dissemination. In order to construct the huts an enquiry was made regarding the ownership of the land. It was found that most of the land was village-common and everyone involved agreed that it should be donated to the Gurdwara (or hermitage for Baba Nand Singh Ji). Similarly, a small piece belonged to some Muslim land owners, who also donated it and thus the construction was started after the legal papers for transfer were executed. Another Muslim, whose land had a common boundary with the land, initially opposed the construction of a Gurdwara there, but suddenly became a devotee of Baba Ji. According to him one early morning when he got up and started for work in his fields, he saw that a strange celestial light came from sky and entered the mud hut of Baba Ji. For the rest of his life he remained a devoted sevadar of Baba Ji. On completion of construction of the mud hut for Guru Granth Sahib, the initial daily programme was set up as follows:

> All devotees were to gather inside the room of Guru Granth Sahib at 4:00 PM. The programme started with reading from the translation of Guru Granth Sahib. This was done for an hour and a half followed by Keertan for two hours. After that Rehras (the evening prayer) was recited; which took about half an hour. Then Keertan sung again for two hours followed by recitation of Sohila (the bed time prayer) and concluding supplication (Ardas). At about 10:45 everyone was allowed to leave[12]. Duties to carry out various phases of the programme were distributed among devotees. Baba Ji himself vowed to observe the following discipline:
>
> 1. Never to touch money.
> 2. Never to see a woman unless she was accompanied by her father, brother or husband.

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[12] Gradually this kind of programme was expanded to cover almost all 24 hours of the day (leaving about 4 hours for sleeping. Baba Ji slept only for a couple of hours.

3. Never to attend a gathering where there was intention to honour him (because it ignited the fire of ego).
4. Never to get involved in the Anand Kaaraj ceremony for anyone.
5. Never to boast about his own capabilities.
6. Always stay in Sikhi form.
7. Never to deliberately curse or bless anyone.
8. Never to get involved in laying the foundation stone of a Gurdwara or any other religious institution.
9. Never to erect a permanent abode.

In a nutshell, he vowed to forsake all those activities that enhanced one's ego. Everyone who came in contact with Baba Ji knows that he successfully observed all these rules throughout his life.

Bhai Santa Singh was exiled from his home-state, Nabha, because of taking active part in the Gurdwara Jaito agitation. All his property was also confiscated by the state government. He was a good singer and was accomplished in doing Gurbani Keertan. He came to Kaleraan, saw Baba Ji and the atmosphere at the 'Thaath' and daily programme of congregational meeting and Keertan. He was so much impressed that he took a vow to spend the rest of his life there. When he expressed this thought to Baba Ji, he said, "We do not have any organized arrangement for boarding and lodging; but if you have decided to stay here, then I have no objection". Bhai Santa Singh humbly replied, "I am ready to live the way you will let me do". Thus he started doing Keertan at the 'Thaath'. Shortly after that Bhai Mewa Singh and Giani Kartar Singh also came and joined him thus completing the first Keertan Jatha (group).

After a few days Baba Ji left for Majha and spent about six months in Pattoki and Veer Singh Wala areas and then, without telling any of his close devotees except his personal attendant, proceeded towards Baagh/Jhang Maghiana (now in Pakistan). This time he stayed outside of Maghiana at the farm of Bhai Ladha Ram where because of a tubewell there was plenty of water available which Baba Ji liked. In spite of repeated requests from Sardar Jaswant Singh on behalf of the sangat (congregation) of Baagh, he refused to move to the hermitage near the mound saying, "Guru Nanak has not given permission to move from here yet".

During Baba Ji's stay at the farm Bhai Ladha Ram brought food everyday. As already mentioned, Baba Ji ate the food only after Guru Nanak had accepted it[13]. One day Bhai Ladha Ram himself could not come and sent the food through his servant. Baba Ji asked his personal attendant, Bhai Uttam Singh, to perform the duty of having Guru Nanak taste the food. After some time Bhai Uttam Singh came and said, "Sir, Guru Nanak has refused to taste the food". Baba Ji had that food thrown away. When inquired, it was found that the servant on his way had smoked a cigarette. Bhai Ladha Ram, when came to know of this, came to Baba Ji and humbly begged for forgiveness.

After staying there for about five months Baba Ji went to Nanaksar (Kaleraan). Now devotees from different areas started arriving with the requests for Baba Ji to visit their towns but he always followed the order received from Guru Granth Sahib. This time the order came for the town of Choonian in Majha. A bus was chartered to take Baba Ji and his entourage to Jagraon railway station from where the train for Choonian was to be caught. On the way to Jagraon Baba Ji asked the bus driver to stop the bus but he continued driving, saying that there was no time to waste if we had to catch the train . Suddenly a wheel of the bus came off and the bus had to be stopped. Miraculously, however, no one was hurt. Baba Ji got down and walked towards a nearby field and stopped there. Suddenly a large cobra came towards Baba Ji. Some devotees intended to kill it but Baba Ji said, "The time if its death has not yet arrived". The cobra finally stopped at the feet of Baba Ji and quietly lay down there. At that time Baba Ji said now you may kill it. The devotees obeyed the order and then as Baba Ji said, they buried the snake at a nearby spot. All the devotees accompanying Baba Ji were then asked to recite Japu Ji and Sohila. Following this a supplication to Akaal Purakh was made for the liberation of the snake's soul. That night Baba Ji stayed in a nearby village and the next morning left for Choonian.

Early in 1927 Baba Ji started for Baagh and stopped over at Nanakana Sahib for a day for pilgrimage. Here Bhai Samund Singh, the head Ragi of the main Gurdwara (Janam Asthan) came for obeisance and accompanied Baba Ji to the Gurdwara *Janam Asthan*. On the way a large number of devotees gathered to whom Baba Ji gave a sermon on the basis of the Gurbani stanza: *"Gurmukh Rom Rom Har Dhiavai"*. After pilgrimage of different Gurdwaras Baba Ji left for Baagh. This time he stayed, in a temporary hermitage constructed at a new site in the wilderness closer to Baagh, for about three months and then went to Bhucho to pay respect to Baba Harnam Singh Ji who had called him telepathically. In his hurry to reach Bhucho Baba Ji's car driver used a short cut that involved the use of a canal service road. A canal overseer was furious to know of this blatant violation of law and wanted to have Baba Nand Singh Ji punished. As a result of his use of some derogatory words for Baba Nand Singh Ji in the presence of Baba Harnam Singh Ji, he was cursed by the latter[14].

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[13] It is believed that Baba Nand Singh Ji ate only after the food had been accepted (tasted) and thus sanctified by Guru Nanak. Such was his devotion. A story to this effect has already been described.

As already mentioned Baba Nand Singh Ji often used to communicate telepathically with Baba Harnam Singh Ji. One morning when he tried to contact he got no reply. He immediately asked his devotees to get ready to leave for Bhucho Within a few hours of his decision he received a telegram informing that Baba Harnam Singh Ji had left for his heavenly abode. On reaching Bhucho he found out that for some unknown reason some of Baba Harnam Singh Ji's close disciples had, against his will, put his body to cremation (for detail see the biography of Baba Harnam Singh Ji). Baba Nand Singh Ji, in utter disappointment for such blatant disregard of the wish of his Guru quickly left Bhucho.

Once on his way to Kaleraan (Nanaksar) from Baagh[15] Baba Ji got down from the train at Montgomery railway station. At that time he had one personal attendant (Sardar Jaswant Singh of Baagh) and a Ragi Jatha (a small group of Gurbani singers) accompanying him. He told the attendant to go to the dairy farm of Sir Datar Singh[16] that was at a distance of three miles. On reaching there they found that Sir Datar Singh was out of station. The manager, who was not a Sikh, however, thinking Baba Ji to be a revered Sant, did not object him and his companions to stay at the dairy farm. But the next day when the news of Baba Ji's arrival reached the town, hundreds of devotees started coming to the farm. Also in the morning when the Ragis started the Keertan, the sound of Tabla drums coupled with movement of a large number of devotees disturbed the cows. Also the special variety of grass being developed for the project was being trampled by the visiting devotees. The manager got afraid that this might result in a drop in the production of milk. He therefore went to Baba Ji and requested him politely to move out of the dairy farm[17]. Baba Ji immediately moved from there to the city Gurdwara of Sri Guru Singh Sabha. (It is interesting to note here that one Dr. Murli Dhar of Montgomery, who was a very pious man and meditated every day, had foreseen, a few days earlier, the incident of Baba Ji's going to the dairy farm and then leaving it. He had told this to his friend Charan Singh Sodhi.)

A Muslim landlord, Chaudhary Sultan Ahmed, who was also the Zaildar of the area, was a God-fearing person. When he heard of Baba Ji's leaving the dairy farm and going to the Gurdwara, he went to the Gurdwara and humbly requested that Baba Ji stay in his garden that was located at a beautiful spot near the canal. Baba Ji, after ascertaining that the Chaudhary's request was genuine and he was prepared even to sustain any losses due to the coming and going of a large number of people in the garden, agreed to move and spent a few days there.

In 1929 Baba Nand Singh Ji again went to Montgomery area where he pitched his tents about four miles outside the city. He had half a dozen *sevadars* with him whom he told not to inform anyone about their arrival. He also asked everyone to go to the nearby forest, collect dry wood, sell it in the town and with the money thus received, purchase the groceries for the langar. The *Sevadars* did this for a couple of days but soon the news of Baba Ji's arrival spread in the area and several devotees came and requested for the *seva* to serve the langar. Baba Ji asked them that he would accept their request only if they earned the money by manual labour and then bought the provisions for the langar. For a few days these devotees did as they were told (earned money for the langar by performing manual labour), after which Baba Ji said, "Your sincerity and humility has been accepted by Guru Nanak. Now you can get back to your professional work". Baba Ji stayed there for three months in a log cabin specially constructed for Guru Granth Sahib and him. During this period many villagers from neighbouring villages came, listened to the celestial sermons of Baba Ji and became sincere followers of Sikhi. They gave up the use of intoxicants and tobacco and started leading their lives as peaceful citizens.

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[14] A detailed account of this incident is given in the biography of Baba Harnam Singh Ji.

[15] During his life time Baba Nand Singh Ji spent most of his time spreading the word of Guru Nanak in the following areas:

1. In the Malwa tract of Punjab, Jagraon, Moga, Bathinda, and adjoining areas.
2. In the Majha tract of Punjab, Choonian, Veer Singh Walas and adjoining areas.
3. In the 'bar' tract of Punjab, Baagh, Maghiana and adjoining areas.

Occasionally he also visited some other parts of Punjab. These three areas are so far apart that one wonders who decided for him to go there. According to him it was the direction from Akaal Purakh that decided for him where he should go and for how long.

It is amazing that such a far flung area like Baagh and Jhang-Maghiana where the influence of Sikhi was minimal, because of his visits, became a fortress of Sikhi and devotion to Guru Nanak.

[16] Sir Datar Singh was an agricultural scientist who had done lot of research of developing some breeds of cows for milk. He had leased a large tract of land from the Government where he was doing some experiments on developing a new variety of grass to enhance the yield of milk.

[17] Sir Datar Singh on returning came to Baba Ji and apologised for the behaviour of the manager, but Baba Ji said that the manager's fear was justified.

The deputy collector of the area heard about Baba Ji. One day he came to see him and brought a basket full of mangoes as offering. He thought that Baba Ji would be thrilled to see the out-of-season mangoes and then he (the deputy) would request Baba Ji to pray for him so that he gets a son. However, Baba Ji did not accept his offering. He came out of Baba Ji's room with the basket and started distributing the mangoes among the *sevadars*. Bhai Santa Singh Ragi took the first mango and was about to eat it when Baba Ji called from inside his room and said, "Santa Singh, do you want to take birth as deputy's son? If so, then go ahead and eat the mango". Bhai Santa Singh immediately threw the mango away.

The same year Baba Nand Singh Ji went to Jhorara village. At that time there was no Gurdwara in this village. Baba Ji asked why such a big village did not have a Gurdwara? Someone said; "Sir, for quite some time the building material to construct one has been sitting at the spot picked for the Gurdwara but because of disunity among some land owners no progress has been made". Baba Ji called the persons concerned and within a few minutes everyone agreed to start the construction immediately. Baba Ji called all the five Numberdars of the village and

with their consent the building was started.

Bhai Bagga Singh was a fairly well-to-do farmer in Jhorara. Although he came from Sikh lineage his family members were followers of Sakhi Sarvar. He had a thirteen years old son named Inder Singh who used to keep a watch at night for the family owned field of melons that was ready to be harvested those days. One night as he was on his duty he heard a voice saying, "Youngman, I have come here for you ad you are lying in your field"? Inder Singh could not locate the source of the voice but suddenly developed an urge to go to Baba Nand Singh Ji who, he knew, was visiting their village those days[18]. (It is interesting to note that during the previous visit of Baba Ji, when he stayed there for two weeks, Inder Singh never visited him in spite of instigations from friends and relatives). The next morning he asked his cousin, Jagir Singh, to accompany him to go to Baba Ji. He took a few melons with him and the two boys went to where Baba Ji was staying. Baba Ji made Inder Singh sit close to him and affectionately asked him many questions. Inder Singh felt great joy in sitting next to Baba Ji and talking to him.

Baba Nand Singh Ji then moved to visit the Majha tract and stayed for almost two months at a place called the tomb of Yogi Bishan Das which is located at about a mile from the town of Choonian. No one usually dared stay at this place because Yogi Bishan Das' spirit was said to roam and frighten those who stayed there overnight.

One day Baba Ji called Surain Singh, one of his close devotees and said, "Go in the jungle in such and such direction for about a mile. You will see a monkey with white tail and a white spot on its forehead, sitting on an Indian rosewood tree. On seeing you it will come down and start following you. Bring it here". Surain Singh did as he was ~~told and~~ after some effort brought the monkey to Baba Ji. As Surain Singh bowed before Baba Ji, the monkey also did so. Baba Ji took the monkey in his lap and lovingly caressed it. Then he said, "This monkey will pass away tomorrow. Feed it well today and bring it in the congregation meeting tomorrow evening and seat it on a neat sheat". The next evening the monkey passed away as it sat on the sheet. On Baba Ji's directions the dead monkey was given a bath, wrapped in that white sheet and buried in the path where the congregation members passed. Japu Ji and Sohila were recited and then it was buried. Baba Ji then told the story of the previous life of the monkey when he was the Mahant of a Dera and the reason why he had to take this form even though he had, by and large, led a virtuous life.

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[18] This young boy later on dedicated his life in the service of Baba Ji. His name was changed to Ishar Singh and he became the successor to Baba Nand Singh Ji.

Within a few days after returning to Nanaksar from Choonian, the devotees from Jhorara came and requested Baba Ji to visit their village because the Gurdwara building had been completed. Baba Ji agreed to spend a day there. On reaching Jhorara he was very pleased to see the beautiful building of the Gurdwara and gave it the name, *"Sukh Sagar"*. When the *sangat* (congregation) requested Baba Ji to stay for some more time, he said, "If by tomorrow you can erect a room for me then I will stay here for some time". Immediately the necessary building materials were procured and within a day the room' as well as an underground cell (for meditation)' were constructed. Baba Ji then stayed there for almost six months and preached the villagers to take *"Khande di Pauhul"*. As a result almost half the population of the village and many more from adjoining villages took *Pauhul*. The recipients included even the notorious robber of the area, Ganga and his companions.

During this stay young Inder Singh (whose story has already been described) started coming regularly to attend the congregational meetings. Not only did he come but also prepared food with great devotion which Baba Ji partook lovingly. One day Baba Ji asked young Inder Singh to go to Lehra Khana and receive some education from Baba Wadhawa Singh Ji. Inder Singh went there with some of his friends but after only a few days the boys started getting homesick. Baba Wadhawa Singh Ji gave them permission to leave and they returned to Jhorara. On returning home when Inder Singh went back to Baba Ji and told him the reason for his returning, Baba Ji said, "It is alright; at least now you have the stamp of Lehra. Now you must do *seva*". Inder Singh immediately immersed himself in the *seva* of the congregation which included serving water to all devotees and passers by at the stall that was opened on the behest of Baba Ji. At the same time he helped his family in the farming and at night learned Gurbani.

Baba Nand Singh Ji had an unshakeable faith that Guru Granth Sahib was not only the embodiment of Akaal Purakh's word (Shabad) uttered through Guru Nanak and other Gurus (and Bhagats). He also believed that if one had such a level of faith then one could actually behold the physical form of Guru Nanak through Guru Granth Sahib. He proved it by not only himself having the vision *(Darshan)* of Guru Nanak but also making some others have the *'darshan'* of the physical form of Guru Nanak.

For example, in January of 1930 Baba Wadhawa Singh Ji came to see Baba Nand Singh Ji when he was staying in the Navaan Pind village near Bathinda. One day while talking to his disciple Baba Wadhawa Singh Ji said, "I have heard that you have *Darshan* of Guru Nanak Dev Ji almost daily. Could you kindly request Guru Nanak on my behalf so that I could also, if only once, have his *Darshan*"? Baba Nand Singh Ji agreed and at an appropriate time took Baba Wadhawa Singh Ji to the room where *Guru Granth Sahib* was installed. After an hour or so when the two came out, Baba Wadhawa Singh was crying. When a close devotee asked him the reason for crying, Baba Ji said, "I am crying because after experiencing the supreme ecstasy for only a few moments I have been separated from it. How now could I live without it for the rest of my life"?

The Baisakhi festival was approaching; therefore Baba Ji, as was his annual routine, went to Damdama Sahib. After the pilgrimage of Damdama Sahib, Baba Ji went to Taran Taran where the *'Kar Seva'* for the cleaning of the *sarovar* (lake) had started. He took part in the *seva* by moving a few buckets of muddy clay from the *sarovar*. All the accompanying devotees also took part in the *kar seva*. From Taran Taran Baba Ji went to Amritsar where an interesting incident happened.

In Baba Ji's entourage there were many devotees who were farmers from Jhorara. They all had taken *Khande di Pauhul*. However, their attire included a (Punjabi) Sarong tied to their waists over the Kachhehra. Baba Ji went to *Akaal Takhat* to see the weapons of Guru Hargobind (the sixth Master). When the devotees tried to follow him, the Akaali sevadars on the watch stopped them saying that only those who had taken Khande di Pauhul could go in. When all of them said that they had taken the Pauhul, they were asked to take off their Sarongs and show that they had Kachhehras underneath. All of them did this and were then allowed in.

In 1932 a young farmer came to Baba Ji and said, "Sir, I have contracted leprosy which, everyone tells me, is an infectious and incurable disease. But I have full faith that your blessing would cure me of this malady. Therefore kindly give me your blessings so that I could go back to my family". Baba Ji said, "Only Guru can give such blessings. You should go to Taran Taran and participate in the *kar seva* of the *sarovar*. The rate of cure of your malady will depend on your faith and enthusiasm with which you do the *seva*". The farmer immediately went to Taran Taran and immersed himself in *kar seva*. Within a month he was fully cured of leprosy.

Baba Nand Singh Ji went to Choonian where the devotees, with great enthusiasm, had erected a temporary Kuttiaa (hermitage[19]). They wanted Baba Ji to stay for some time there. Baba Ji was very pleased to see the devotion and enthusiasm of the sangat of Choonian and stayed there for four months. One day when Baba Ji had gone for a walk towards the river that was a few miles from the hermitage, a devotee brought his horse and requested Baba Ji to ride back. Baba Ji rode the horse but for some unknown reason the horse suddenly jumped and Baba Ji fell down spraining his ankles and also sustained some minor injuries. Even then Baba Ji walked to the Kuttiaa and attended the evening congregational meeting. Soon the doctor arrived, treated the injuries and dressed both ankles. Before leaving, the doctor advised that the injured parts should not be exposed to water for a few days. The next morning, however, Baba Ji got up according to his daily routine at 12:30 AM and took a bath. He then covered himself with a sheet and told his attendant not to disturb him. Saying so, he went into deep meditation and for two days stayed in meditation mode. The attendants and devotees started getting worried; but no one had the courage to disobey his order. Finally on the third day Baba Ji opened his eyes and got up. He had completely recovered from his injuries.

From Choonian Baba Ji went to Deo Sial. The weather was extremely hot therefore the devotees erected a small hut made of elephant grass under a Jujube tree for him. Inside the hut it was always cool and comfortable. One day a roaming ascetic came to see Baba Ji. On entering the hut he said, "What a wonderful place it is to live in during such a hot weather". Baba Ji immediately got up and said to him, "Since you like this place so much, therefore you should stay here". Saying so, he walked out of the hut.

From Deo Sial Baba Ji went to Hujra, a nearby town, for a few days. At Hujra, Bulaki Ram was one of the foremost devotees of Baba Ji, but he had the habit of smoking hooka. Baba Ji advised him to take *Khande di Pauhul*. He said, "I will take the Pauhul next year because my system is saturated with the odour of tobacco, and it will take one year for this odour to dissipate". Baba Ji said, "What if the death grabs you before that"? Bulaki Ram said, "Sir, since I came under your refuge I am not afraid of death, it can come any time. But I request that before I die I should see you". Baba Ji smiled and said, "Your wish will be fulfilled". Within the year Bulaki Ram died and a few days before his death Baba Ji went to Hujra to fulfil his promise[20].

From Choonian Baba Ji went on a missionary tour of adjoining area for a couple of months and then returned to Choonian. In the intervening period the devotees enlarged and beautified the Kuttiaa (hermitage). They were very proud of the result of their efforts and thought that Baba Ji would like to spend most of his time at such a beautiful place. To their utter surprise and disappointment however, when after only a relatively short time Baba Ji decided to leave Choonian he gave the orders to demolish and burn down the Kuttiaa. He said, "Ego is the worst malady of man. If this Kuttiaa had stayed then not only the Sangat of Choonian would have had the ego of constructing such a beautiful place but probably I would also have had the ego of living in it".

Bhai Sunder Singh, a poor farmer in Jhorara had unshakeable faith in Baba Nand Singh Ji. Once he got some gram beans parched. He was very hungry and the fragrance of these parched beans was very enticing. But before eating he thought of Baba Nand Singh Ji and in his innocence took a vow that he would not eat until Baba Ji came and ate the beans and drank water first. For three days he sat there without eating or drinking anything. On the fourth day Baba Ji who was in Kaleraan told his close companions to hurry up and leave for Jhorara. A bus was immediately chartered and Baba Ji with his entourage left for Jhorara. At about ten in the morning when the bus was still at some distance from the village Baba Ji asked the driver to stop the bus. He quickly got down and started walking through the fields full of thorny bushes. On reaching the small hut where Sunder Singh was sitting Baba Ji entered and asked him to give some parched beans. After eating the beans he took some water and then said to the farmer, "You should not put me through such tough tests in future".

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[19] Never in his whole life, Baba Nand Singh Ji got a permanent hermitage built. He always said, "why build a permanent living place when the abode in this world is temporary?".

[20] Bulaki Ram's children took Khande di Pauhul.

About two miles from Bathinda near the canal there was a circular pond that was about 15 feet deep. This pond was excavated by the British Government when an army cantonment was proposed to be established there; but for some reasons the plan was abandoned. Baba Ji liked this place, because according to him, sitting in the middle of the pond one was completely cut off from the world. Some local devotees saw that Baba Ji intended to stay there; therefore they got the pond cleaned and had steps constructed to go down to the bottom. Then they also got two rooms (one for Guru Granth Sahib and one for Baba Ji) constructed and from next day the congregational meetings were held there.

In December on the occasion of Pooranmashi (full moon night) congregation[21] a number of devotees came from Jhorara. Two youngmen, Ishar Singh and Jagir Singh were among these devotees. After a couple of days when the Jhorara group went to Baba Ji to take permission to return, he said, "Inder Singh and Jagir Singh should stay here. The rest of you can go". The two youngmen stayed and immersed themselves in various kinds of *seva* (serving water, reciting Sukhmani Sahib, participating in Keertan etc.).

Next month (on January Pooranmashi congregation) when devotees from Jhorara came again, Inder Singh's mother, Mata Partap Kaur, also came with them. Baba Ji said to her, "Mother, lest you think that I have permanently detained your son here, you can take him along when you return home". The mother said, "Baba Ji, some time back Inder Singh had a skin disease which could not be cured by any medicine. At that

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[21] Baba Ji used to celebrate every Pooranmashi as the birthday of Guru Nanak.

time I had taken a vow that if he is cured of the disease then I will offer him to you as a *sevadar* at the Thaath. Soon after that he got cured. Now he is yours. Put him to any *seva* you wish. I have no claim on him". The mother thus returned home and Inder Singh never went back. (He became the personal *sevadar* of Baba Ji and discharged his duties so diligently and with humility that he became the spiritual heir to Baba Nand Singh Ji.)

In January of 1934 Baba Ji left the pond at Bathinda and went back to Baagh (Jhang) and stayed there for two weeks at a well known as "Santaan wala Khooh" outside the town under a large tent. Bhai Inder Singh, who was now the personal attendant of Baba Ji, was given a new name, Ishar Singh, because Baba Ji liked names that reminded one of Akaal Purakh. A few days before the Baisakhi, according to his routine, Baba Ji left Baagh to go to Damdama Sahib for pilgrimage. From Damdama Sahib he returned to his Thaath at Kaleraan, Nanaksar.

In August of 1934, on a request from Sardar Sampooran Singh (one of the foremost devotees of Baba Ji from Delhi), and getting approval from Guru Granth Sahib, Baba Ji went to Delhi along with four or five Ragis and attendants and liked a spot along the so called "Khooni Naala"[22] (bloody brook). The place was away from the city where no one came even during the day time because the only approach was a foot path. Baba Ji said, "Those who are devotees of Guru Nanak and seekers of truth would find this place. We are not interested in gathering crowds anyway". To the amazement of everyone within a few days a large number of devotees started coming to attend the evening congregation meetings. Some Bengalis who lived in the Government quarters not too far from there also started coming. When asked if they understood any part of the programme, they said, "Even though we do not understand the language we get peace of mind by listening to the Keertan". Not only they became regular attenders but soon they also brought food for the langar and some fabric for the clothing of Baba Ji and his companions.

One Mr. Majumdar, who was a superintendent in the department of Archeology, was seriously involved in the practice of Yoga. For over thirty years he had been practicing Yoga but still his "Kundalini" had not started rising[23]. He had gone to many famous Yogis but no one could solve his problem. One night when he started his Yoga practice, he heard a voice which told him that his emancipator had arrived and was staying near the Khooni Naala. The next morning he went there to see Baba Ji. It started raining but he kept on waiting in the rain. At about four in the afternoon Baba Ji called him in his tent. As soon as he saw Baba Ji he said something aloud in Bengali language[24] and then ran towards Baba Ji and placed his head on his feet. Baba Ji picked him up and said, "You seem to have worked very hard but have not succeeded in your mission. Now what do you want"? Mr. Majumdar, who knew only Bengali or English, started talking in English and a devotee translated in Punjabi, that he was requesting Baba Ji to show him the right path. Baba Ji then said to him, "You have gone astray from the right path and will have to come back before you could proceed further. Come here after a week and with Guru Nanak's grace your problem will be solved". When Majumdar tried to say that he would like the grace be bestowed on him quickly, Baba Ji said, "To achieve something one has to give up one's I-am-ness". Majumdar begged for Baba Ji's forgiveness and left. But for him it was difficult to wait for a week. He therefore came again the next day and Baba Ji called him in his tent. When he came out he looked very happy. He then kept on coming everyday for the rest of the week. On someone's asking he said, "What I could not achieve after 33 years of hard work, Baba Ji has given me within a week".

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[22] This brook got its name because around it there was a thick jungle where several cases of murder had occurred.

While at Delhi Baba Ji went for pilgrimage of all the historical Gurdwaras. Also here Sardar Madhusudan Singh, also known as *Kavi Ji*, came to see him and became a devotee for the rest of his life. He is the one who first started the tradition of recitation of *Kavita* (poetry other than Gurbani) in Baba Ji's congregations.

During the winter months of 1934-35 Baba Ji went to Baagh (Jhang) and stayed in a new Kuttiya in the middle of a jungle, called Widana (a couple of miles from Baagh). From there he returned to Delhi.

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[23] According to the science of Yoga 'Kundalini' is a vein located at the root of the vein 'Sukhmana' (under the belly-button). It is coiled up like a snake. By correct yogic practices it starts rising through Sukhmana vein, finally reaching the tenth portal (in the head), when the Yogi attains the state of 'equipoise'.

[24] He later on told that he saw the vision of his preceptor in Baba Ji. That is why his unusual behaviour.

While at Delhi one day Seth Jugal Kishore Birla, one of the top industrialists of India saw a huge crowd converging in the jungle on the back of Birla temple. On enquiring he was told that a Sikh mystic had arrived there. After a couple of days he came to see Baba Ji. He had to wait for a long time before he could see Baba Ji. After talking for some time he went back but was so much impressed by Baba Ji's personality that after a few days he came back with his friend, Rai Bahadur Narain Das, who was a devotee. On asking if he could do any service, Baba Ji said, "In Guru Nanak's house service reigns supreme. One should do service to one's capacity and ability and never procrastinate". The next day the Seth arranged for langar for five thousand persons.

Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala always had great respect for Sikh Sants like Sant Attar Singh Ji of Mastuana, Baba Harnam Singh Ji of Bhucho and some other well known Sants of that time. However, on instigation by the Raja of Darbhanga he became a devotee of a tantric Yogi from Bengal, who possessed some occult powers by which he impressed the Maharaja. As a result the Maharaja started taking to Tantric ways of life. This greatly worried the Sikh high officials of the state. Sardar Harchand Singh, a high official in the state agriculture department was a close devotee of Baba Nand Singh Ji. He came and requested Baba Ji to kindly visit Patiala and put the Maharaja, who had gone astray, back on the correct path of Sikhi.

From Delhi Baba Ji went to Patiala and picked a spot in the wilderness, a couple of miles outside the city, for staying. Within a few days Baba Ji's fame spread throughout the city and adjoining towns and villages. A large number of people started coming to the congregational meetings. The Maharaja was out of Patiala those days but the Tantric was there and he felt that Baba Ji's presence in the city was a grave danger to his influence on the Maharaja. He therefore sent one of his foremost disciples to ask Baba Ji a couple of questions. He thought that Baba Ji was totally uneducated and would not be able to answer his questions, which required deep knowledge of Vedanta, and would therefore leave Patiala. However, when the disciple came and saw the atmosphere with angelic appearance of all the Ragis and Sevadars and perceived the celestial glow on Baba Ji's face, he could not muster courage to ask the questions and quietly left. This was the beginning of the end of influence of the Tantric in Patiala state.

After the pilgrimage of Damdama Sahib on the occasion of Baisakhi of 1935 Baba Ji returned to Nanaksar and from there proceeded to Baagh (Jhang) after a few days.

While at Baagh a Muslim Pir, Murad Shah Kukara, who was a big landlord of the area also, came to see Baba Ji. When Baba Ji heard of his arrival he came out of his room to meet with him. The Shah bowed and then took his sash (which he always carried around his neck), spread it before Baba ji and said, "I have come to a perfect fakir today and am not going to go back empty- handed". Baba Ji stayed quiet for a few minutes and then said, "Do you know Shah Ji! That what you are asking for, comes at a price, and I hope that you also know that price"? The Pir said, "Yes sir, I know that the price for what I am requesting for is my head". Baba Ji then said, "Think and tell me whether or not you have already given your head to someone else". The Shah stayed quiet for some time and then picked up his sash and said, "Thank you sir, you have already filled my sash because you have restored my faith in my preceptor".

Sardars Harchand Singh and Basheshar Singh, who were both high officials in the state of Patiala, were also devotees of Baba Nand Singh Ji. They were very unhappy with the unsavoury conduct of the Maharaja (of Patiala) because of his leaning towards Tantric practices. They wanted to somehow bring the Maharaja in contact with Baba Ji and thus try to bring him back towards Sikhi. They knew that a large area of Shivalak hills belonged to the state of Patiala and the Maharaja usually spent most of the summer there. Therefore they requested Baba Ji to spend a summer in the beautiful Shivalak hills where it was very pleasant during that period of the year. Baba Ji, after taking permission from Guru Granth Sahib, agreed to visit the happy valley of Saproon which was a part of the state of Patiala.

Midway between the towns of Solan and Kanda Ghat there is a hill known as Karol which is 8000 feet in height. Going to Karol from Salograh railway station, one comes across a beautiful pasture where there is a fountain whose water goes into a small lake surrounded by a thick cluster of trees. Baba Ji liked this place and had all his entourage moved there while he himself walked further uphill and stayed under a rock. Not far from the lake was the hermitage of an Udasi Sant (Lachhman Das) who came to see Baba Ji and requested him to come and stay in his hermitage. Baba Ji visited his Kuttiaa and asked the Ragis to stay there.

One morning Baba Ji walked towards the Saproon valley and reached in the middle of a thick jungle that was Maharaja's hunting area for big game. The Maharaja had invited the viceroy of India, Lord Wellingdon, who was scheduled to arrive within a week for tiger hunt. All arrangements had meticulously been made. A 'machan' (platform for the hunter) had been erected and at some distance a peg to tie a calf (to entice the tiger) had been posted. Baba Ji (for reasons of his own) liked this particular spot; had the peg removed and used the platform to sit on for meditation. When Sardar Harchand Singh came and saw this he was afraid that the Maharaja would be furious and could even insult Baba Ji. He requested Baba Ji that the spot where he was sitting was meant for the viceroy to sit next week to hunt a tiger. Baba Ji said, "The viceroy would have sit here to kill Akaal Purakh's creature but I am sitting here to remember Him". However, Sardar Harchand Singh, fearing the fury of the Maharaja, went to the conservator of the forests who was his friend and told him the whole story and said, "Please go to the Maharaja and tell him that I have dismantled the machan, removed the peg and have requested Baba Nand Singh Ji to use the spot for meditation". The conservator took Harchand Singh to the Maharaja and said as Harchand Singh wanted him to say. The Maharaja, in the mean time had already heard the real story. He quietly listened to the conservator and went inside the palace without saying anything. It was later on discovered that the Maharaja had requested the viceroy to postpone his hunting trip because he (the Maharaja) had fallen ill[25].

Baba Ji spent about three weeks there and then returned to Nanaksar when he heard that Sant Gulab Singh (Gholia) was seriously ill. Only a few days after arriving in Nanaksar, Sant Gulab Singh passed away in Moga. Baba Ji, on hearing the news, immediately went to Moga and saw that all arrangements for cremation were made properly. After cremation he returned to Nanaksar only to go back ten days later again to Moga to attend the final supplication for the eternal peace of Sant Ji's soul. Then he returned to Nanaksar, stayed for a month and then proceeded to Delhi.

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[25] This was the first indirect contact of the Maharaja with Baba Ji. Later on he became a devotee.

While at Delhi, one day a few Jat women from an adjoining village came and stood in front of Baba Ji's tent. Baba Ji came out and asked what they wanted. They said, "Baba, we need rain; please get us rain". Baba Ji smiled and said, "Do not ask such things; Just recite Ram, Ram". The women immediately started reciting Ram Ram. After some time they said, "Baba, as you asked us, we have recited Ram Ram; now you must get us rain". Baba Ji was deeply affected by their innocence. He gave them 'prashad' and said, "Go home and continue your recitation". The next day it rained heavily in and around Delhi. After leaving Delhi Baba Ji went to Nanaksar, stayed there for a short time and then proceeded to Baagh to spend the winter there.

Baba Ji asked the Sardar brothers (Sunder Singh, Heera Singh, Hakam Singh and Jaswant Singh) to build a fortress at their farm outside the town of Baagh and start a Gurdwara within the compound of the fortress. He gave them the dimensions of the fortress and the height of its walls, and instructed that not a single piece of wood should be used in the whole project. The villagers were wondering why in a village where there were already two Gurdwaras Baba Ji wanted another one. Baba Ji, in one of his discourses said, "Bad times are coming and only those who come unto the refuge of Guru Nanak would stay unscathed". The construction was immediately started and in the center of the fortress compound Gurdwara building was erected. A string of Akhand Paaths was started which continued there[26] for several years. After spending the months of winter Baba Ji left Baagh, went to Nanaksar for a few weeks and then went to Hoshiarpur.

While giving a Gurbani discourse in Gurdwara Singh Sabha, Hoshiarpur he asked the Sangat if there was a Gurdwara of Bhai Joga Singh in the town? Some leaders from the congregation said, "No sir, there is no Gurdwara in the memory of Bhai Joga Singh; because such a memorial would remind how deep a leading Sikh could fall". Baba Ji laughed and said, "On the contrary such a memorial would remind how the Guru saved a Sikh from falling".

From Hoshiarpur Baba Nand Singh Ji went for a day to Harkhowal and met Sant Jawala Singh Ji, a famous Sikh mystic, and had spiritual discussion. After returning, Baba Ji went towards Jahan Khel, a small village about two miles from Hoshiarpur and stayed outside the village for 10-12 days. One day he went for a walk and entered a garden located at some distance from the village. The gardener told Baba Ji's companions that the owner of the garden was an egoistic person who did not recognize any Sant or Fakir, and therefore would not be happy to have the presence of this group (holy persons) here. Baba Ji ignored his warning and pointed towards a small room in the corner of the garden and said, "That room would be ideal for Guru Granth Sahib. It should be cleaned". The companions started cleaning the room and Baba Ji took a bath at the well. After the bath Baba Ji said, "I am hungry, can someone bring some food"? All companions were wondering from where could they bring food at this time and place that was outside such a tiny village? Then Baba Ji said, go see if there is something hanging on any tree". On searching the companions were surprised to see a kerchief tied to a tree in which there were a few '*rotis*'. Probably someone had tied his lunch some days back to the tree to save it from ants and had then forgotten. Baba Ji divided the rotis into small pieces and distributed among all the companions and said, "Take this right now because Guru Nanak has accepted the offering of a poor person. In a short while a lot of food will be here". After some time the owner of the garden came with a servant who was carrying a large basket full of food. He came and after obeisance to Baba Ji said, "Sir, I came to know that a holy man has come to my garden. I have therefore brought food for your breakfast. Kindly accept it". Baba Ji smiled and asked all the companions to partake the food. He himself also took some and told the garden owner that his '*seva*' had been accepted and that he need not bring anything any more.

After returning from Hoshiarpur Baba Ji stayed at Nanaksar for a few days and then proceeded to Damdama Sahib for his annual pilgrimage on the occasion of Baisakhi. This year the Patiala government had imposed a tax on all the motor vehicles that came to the Gurdwaras where the Baisakhi fair was being held. Baba Ji's entourage was camped outside the city and had to attend the congregational meetings at the Gurdwara twice a day (morning and evening). Baba Ji told the devotees not to pay the tax even if they had to go to jail. The inspector incharge informed the superintendent of police that Baba Nand Singh's companions had refused to pay the tax. The superintendent told the inspector to let them come and go as they wished.

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[26] It is noteworthy that in 1947 at the time of partition of India, when a full scale massacre of Hindus and Sikhs on the Pakistan side and that of Muslims on the Indian side took place, the Hindus and Sikhs of Baagh (which came into Pakistan) took shelter in this fortress. Consequently not a single casualty of Hindus or Sikhs occurred in Baagh. In the adjoining villages most of the Hindu and Sikh families were ruthlessly butchered.

After the Baisakhi festival Baba Ji returned to Nanaksar. Here Sant Mani Singh came to see Baba Ji. He had an extremely melodious voice and did keertan. He also possessed occult powers of which he was very proud. One day while he was doing keertan ego got better of him and he asked one of the *sevadars* to bring water. Then he used his powers such that the *sevadar* could not find water anywhere and returned empty handed. He again asked for water. Baba Ji, who was in meditation, opened his eyes and said to the *sevadar*, "Go to the basement where there is a 'ganga sagar' (a metallic pitcher with lid and a spout) full of water. Bring and give it to sant ji. The *sevadar* brought the '*ganga sagar*' and Sant Mani Singh drank to his fill. Then he opened the lid and was amazed to find that it was still full to the brim. Baba Ji then said to him, "In the house of Guru Nanak the occult powers have no value because they are of no use in the hereafter. If you care for your liberation then give up the exhibition of occult powers". Sant Mani Singh repented on what he had done and promised never to use occult powers in future. After a few days Baba Ji went to Delhi for a few days and then to Baagh (Jhang) where the chain of Akhand Paaths was still going on.

While at Baagh Baba Nand Singh Ji fell sick. The civil surgeon came from Maghiana and prescribed some medicine, but Baba Ji fully believed in Gurbani edict:

ਸਰਬ ਰੋਗ ਕਾ ਅਉਖਦੁ ਨਾਮੁ ॥

He said that a sampat Akhand Paath should be started. Immediately a number of volunteer Paathis (readers of Paath) came forward and Paath was started. After seven days the Paath was completed. Then Baba Ji said to the Paathis that the Paaths were to be continued and henceforth the Paathis were supposed not to partake the food from the langar but make their own arrangement. Even then all the Paathis offered their

services. For six months this chain of Sampat Paaths continued. On the conclusion the Paathis were offered clothes and appropriate sum of money that came to several hundred rupees. But they all respectfully declined. Their leader, Bhai Shyam Singh said, "Sir, the only remuneration that we would accept is a promise that you will hold our hand in the hereafter in the court of Akaal Purakh". Baba Ji was very pleased to hear this answer and presented garlands to all the Paathis.

Those days the law suit for possession of Shaheed Ganj (Lahore) was before the high court and the verdict was expected any day. The Muslim population in the Jhang district was over 80% and they were all excited about the case. Therefore the Hindu and Sikh population was worried - anything could happen. Baba Ji, however, said, "No harm can come to those who take the refuge of Akaal Purakh. With all the *Akhand Paaths* going on here, Akaal Purakh Himself will keep you safe". Then a couple of weeks before the verdict was announced, Baba Ji said, "The verdict is going to be in the favour of Sikhs[27]. Therefore do not worry and continue with the *Akhand Paaths*".

Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala had not been keeping good health for a couple of years. But in the beginning of 1938 his health took a turn for the worse. In spite of the best available medical help (including that of a world renowned doctor from Switzerland) his condition kept on deteriorating. In addition to medical treatment the Maharaja also invited several *Rishis* from Rishikesh and Buddhist *Laamaas* from Tibet to pray for his recovery. But the Maharaja's condition worsened to the extent that the doctors declared that it was a matter of a few days before he would pass away. Some Maharanis then asked Sardar Harchand Singh to go to the Sant (Baba Nand Singh Ji) who had removed the peg in the hunting ground of the Maharaja. When Harchand Singh went and requested Baba Ji to come to Patiala to pray for Maharaja's health, he said, "The Maharaja has been under the influence of the Tantric and removed Guru Granth Sahib from his palace, therefore we have nothing to do with him". Sardar Harchand Singh returned empty handed. But Sardar Gobinder Singh, who was a devotee of Baba Harnam Singh Ji of Bhucho and knew Baba Ji for many years, took Harchand Singh with him and the two went to Baba Ji again and described the whole situation at Patiala. Baba Ji kept quiet for some time and then said, "If I come to Patiala now, then everyone will think that the Maharaja is going to recover. But I am no one to interfere in the will of Akaal Purakh. I will therefore come only on one condition that everyone in Maharaja's family should recite the name of Akaal Purakh and stay contended in His will whether the Maharaja recovers or passes away". When the two agreed then Baba Ji told them to go and start 101 Sampat Akhand Paaths[28], and at the start of the Paaths the Maharaja should supplicate to Akaal Purakh to give him strength so that he could listen to Paaths and be able to join the final Ardaas on the conclusion of the Paaths. The two sardars returned and immediately started the Paaths. However, Baba Ji still did not go to Patiala.

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[27] This is what happened. The verdict was in favour of Sikhs and the Muslim zeal subsided without any unpleasant incident in the Baagh/Maghiana area.

Baba Ji had gone to Lehra Khana to see his teacher when a large number of devotees came to the Gurdwara to listen to Baba Ji's celestial discourse. In this congregational meeting Raja Maheshinder Singh, accompanied by several Sardars from Patiala also came and at the conclusion of the meeting humbly requested the sangat to request Baba Ji to come to Patiala. He also made the same request to Baba Wadhawa Singh Ji who then said to Baba Nand Singh Ji, "Please go to Patiala and if you feel appropriate then make the Maharaja healthy again". Baba Nand Singh Ji said, "Sir, if you say, I will go to Patiala, but I am no one to interfere in the will of Akaal Purakh. It is up to Him to bring the Maharaja back to health or take him away from the world. My only condition for going there is that no one either asks me or expects that I will bring the Maharaja back to health". Raja Maheshinder Singh said, "Sir, we only want you to come there so that the Maharaja can see you once (before departing)". Baba Ji then agreed and immediately started for Patiala where arrangement for his stay was made a couple of miles outside the city in one of Maharaja's gardens. On the morning of the third day after reaching Patiala Baba Ji told his close companions that the Maharaja was not going to live, but as a result of all the *Akhand paaths* his sins have been forgiven. After some time Baba Ji went to the palace where the Maharaja was lying and stood in front of his bed. The arrival of Baba Ji was announced in Maharaja's ears. He then opened his eyes and with the movement of his head did the obeisance. Baba Ji stayed there for some time and then, on a request from the Raanis went to their room for a few minutes. He told the Raanis that everything was in the hands of Akaal Purakh and enjoined them to pray for the peace of Maharaja's soul. Soon after he left the palace the death of Maharaja was announced by firing of guns. Baba Ji sent some close devotees to accompany the funeral procession and he himself left for Nanaksar. After staying there for a few days Baba Ji left for Damdama Sahib for pilgrimage on the occasion of Baisakhi.

The new Maharaja, Yadavinder Singh, after acceding to the Patiala throne, started coming to pay his respect to Baba Ji whenever the time permitted. However, some courtiers did not want the young Maharaja to become a devotee. They therefore tried some subtle tricks to indicate to him that Baba Nand Singh was an illiterate person, devoid of any knowledge of sophisticated Vedantic philosophy, and only those with blind faith fell for him. The Maharaja, however, was too smart to get ensnared in their trap.

After returning from Damdama Sahib Baba Ji stayed at Nanaksar and then Delhi for a few days each and then proceeded to Dehradoon for the first time. On the way he stopped over at Roorkee where earlier in his life he had served in the army Gurdwara for a year. On hearing Baba Ji's arrival many army personnel came to pay their homage. Baba Ji delivered a sermon in the army Gurdwara and then left for Dehradoon.

A couple of miles from the city of Dehradoon, on the Rajpura Road, there was a mango garden known as 'Kandoli Garden', which belonged to a Brahmin family. Inside the garden were two tombs, probably of the ancestors of the owner family. Baba Ji liked this place and had the tombs cleaned. In one tomb Guru Granth Sahib was installed and in the second, a non-stop recitation of Sukhmani Sahib was started. Within a day the devotees constructed a wooden structure where Baba Ji could stay and tents were pitched for the companions. The owners of the garden did not know Baba Ji, but considering that a Sant had come to stay for a couple of days, did not object. When, however, a week passed, they became apprehensive that these Sikhs might have intention of occupying their garden. But before anyone came and said something Baba Ji asked some close devotees to talk to the owners, "We were going to stay only for a few days and are ready to pay appropriate rent for the place". The Brahmin family regretted for their doubts and requested Baba Ji to stay as long as he liked. Baba Ji stayed there for four months. While at Dehradoon Baba Ji visited the Dera of Baba Ram Rai and the *Ragis* did keertan there.

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[28] In a Sampat Akhand Paath a Shabad is selected as the sampat. The shabad of sampat is recited in the middle of Mool Mantra (up to hosee bhee sach) at the end of each shabad, salok or pauri while continuing the Akhand Paath.

The viceroy of India was visiting Dehradoon those days. The Muslim bodyguards of viceroy came to Baba Ji and requested him to visit their Mosque. Baba Ji went there and the Ragis did Keertan around the Baani of Sheikh Farid from Guru Granth Sahib[29].

The Raj Mata of Maharaja Yadavinder Singh of Patiala was worried that her young son who had recently acceded to the throne of the state was under the influence of some Rajput Rajas and might go astray from Sikhi. She therefore wanted to somehow shield him from such influence. She had great faith in Baba Nand Singh Ji whom she sent a message requesting that he should administer Khande di Pauhul to the Maharaja and also personally give blessings on his marriage that was arranged with the daughter of Sardar Harchand Singh Jeji[30]. Both these requests were against the principle of Baba Ji, therefore he told the Raj Mata that he would not be able to personally perform either one of these chores but would request Guru Nanak to be kind and have them completed amicably and successfully. The Raj Mata, however, requested Baba Ji to visit the state, because his presence would be enough for her to believe that Guru Nanak would indeed grace the two events. Baba Ji agreed to visit the Pinjore garden[31] that belonged to the state of Patiala.

On reaching Pinjore Baba Ji asked that thirteen Akhand Paaths be completed in the garden in order to sanctify the place. On the conclusion of the thirteenth Paath several famous Sikh Sants were invited who gave Gurbani discourses. All visiting spiritual dignitaries were accorded great respect by Baba Ji. After this he returned to Kaleraan/Nanaksar and from there proceeded to Majha where he stayed at Pattoki and visited the adjoining villages. After celebrating Guru Nanak Dev's birthday (Gurpurab) he returned to Nanaksar.

From Nanaksar he went to Baagh where he stayed until a few days before the Baisakhi of 1938 when he went, according to his routine, for pilgrimage to Damdama Sahib. After the Baisakhi, Baba Ji went to Shivalak hills and reached the Karol hill. The next morning when Sardar Harchand Singh arrived, Baba Ji told him not to tell the Raj Mata of his arrival. He then asked all his companions to gather any edible roots of bushes and leaves from the jungle, boil and eat them. This continued for a couple of days but Baba Ji's arrival could not stay hidden for too long and the Raj Mata came to know. She immediately made arrangements for all necessary items to be brought and herself arrived soon afterwards. When she came to know what kind of food everyone had been eating she complained to Baba Ji for not informing her of his arrival. Baba Ji smiled and said, "We are dependent only on Akaal Purakh. Whatever He provides we consume and the way He wishes we live and thank Him".

As the news of Baba Ji's arrival spread, many devotees started coming to Karol hill. In spite of logistical difficulties the arrangement for sumptuous langar was appreciable. The Maharaja was staying those days in his summer palace at Chail and frequently walked to attend the congregational meetings. Raj Mata went out of her way to see the comfort of all the companions of Baba Ji. She arranged for the supply of superior and expensive blankets, sheets and pillows and even prepared food for Baba Ji with her own hands and brought it walking a distance of a few miles.

After staying at Karol hill for two months Baba Ji went to Kufri, a skiing resort about ten miles from Shimla. Soon many devotees from Shimla started coming, particularly over the weekends. All arrangements for staying of Baba Ji and his entourage and the langar were made by the Maharaja of Patiala. Many high officials of the state attended the congregational meetings in which Baba Ji gave elaborate sermons, substantiated by quotations from Gurbani, stressing that one must devote as much time as possible in meditation and recitation of Naam.

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[29] These Muslims must be Sheeaas who, unlike the belief of Sunni Muslims, do not consider music a taboo.

[30] This was going to be the second marriage of the Maharaja. He was already married to the princess of Sarai Qila of Assam, but this marriage had not produced an heir to the throne.

[31] Pinjore garden is a very beautiful Mughal style garden, a couple of miles from the town of Pinjore. It was a part of Patiala state at that time.

At Kufri an old Brahmin who was a devotee of goddess Bhagvati, came daily in the congregation and Baba Ji always treated him very kindly by giving him 'prashad'. One day Baba Ji said to him, "You are too old to walk such long distance. Why do you take so much trouble to come here daily"? The Brahmin started crying and said, "I had a vision of Mother Bhagvati who told me to come to you". Baba Ji said, "From today you should stop coming because you are left with only one week of your life. I will come to see you". In the next couple of days Baba Ji went to the Brahmin's place and gave him blessings. The Brahmin passed away at the end of the week.

From Kufri Baba Ji proceeded to Delhi. He asked that all the blankets and sheets donated by the Raj Mata should be distributed among poor people and allowed all his companions (Behangams) to carry only one set of personal clothes. While at Delhi, one day Seth Jugal Kishore Birla (One of the biggest industrialists of India), accompanied by Goswami Ganesh Dutt (a famous Hindu mystic) came to see Baba Ji. Both of them were ushered in the presence of Baba Ji. After obeisance they sat down and started conversation on some spiritual topic. Suddenly Birla looked at Baba Ji's hand and said, "Sir, you have a line that I have been told by experts in palmistry, that only some very special souls sent by God in this world have". Baba Ji kept quiet, but thereafter Birla behaved with extreme reverence towards Baba Ji. Before leaving Birla expressed desire to build a Gurdwara similar to the Birla Temple, but Baba Ji said, "We are not interested in such projects. If you really want to build one, then go and talk to a Committee (SGPC)". Birla and Goswami then initiated the subject of coming events in the country and said, "We have heard from seers that horrible times are approaching in the country; the Muslims will become very powerful. Baba Ji said, "Yes, very bad times are indeed approaching, but we must stay happy and contented in the will of Akaal Purakh and not worry about who is going to become powerful". Birla then requested Baba Ji to pay a visit to Birla Temple. To this Baba Ji agreed and paid a brief visit the next day.

In the congregation of September 1, 1939, Baba Ji described his vision of the previous night in which he had seen a powerful explosion. The same evening the main news on the radio was that Hitler had invaded Poland. The next day Baba Ji left Delhi for Nanaksar.

In December Baba Wadhawa Singh Ji discarded his mortal frame to merge in the Supreme Being. Baba Nand Singh Ji went on the last day of Ardaas (held on the tenth day after passing away) and immediately after the bhog ceremony returned to Nanaksar.

In February of 1940 Baba Ji went on a missionary tour of Majha. While he was at Partapgarh someone started a rumour that on the next new moon day Baba Ji was going to discard his body to merge into the infinite in the Parikarma of Darbar Sahib, Amritsar. This rumour spread like forest fire throughout Punjab and a large number of devotees started converging on Pattoki where Baba Ji was going from Partapgarh. When Baba Ji came to know of this, he said, "There is no truth in this rumour and I have not said anything to imply discarding my body. But whoever has spread this lie has done a good deed to thousands of devotees who are coming to the congregation of the oncoming Pooranmashi.

The congregation gathered at Pattoki on the March 1940 Pooranmashi was unusual in many ways. The number of devotees attending this congregation was estimated at over one hundred thousand (according to some estimates, it was close to two hundred thousand). In this meeting for the first time the loud speakers were used. As was the rule, no one was asked to bring langar nor was it cooked at the site. How and where from the langar came for so many attenders, is no less than a miracle.

As already mentioned, the World War II was in full swing and people were scared. Baba Ji gave elaborate Gurbani discourses in which he emphasized that whoever took Guru Nanak's refuge would be safe in the horrible time that was approaching; because all calamities could be warded off by recitation of Naam and Gurbani. He then enjoined that everyone should make daily routine of reciting two 'paaths' of Sukhmani Sahib or ten paaths of Japu Ji or six rosaries (108 beads) of the Mool Mantra (up to hosee bhee sach). He then guaranteed that those who made such a routine would not only live peacefully in this world but would also be honoured in the court of Akaal Purakh.

On every 'Pooranmashi' (full moon night) congregation Baba Ji used to distribute what he called "Prashad" of paaths of Guru Granth Sahib.

According to him everyone could get the merit equivalent to a complete reading of Guru Granth Sahib by:

1. Completing the recitation of 50 paaths of Sukhmani Sahib; or
2. Completing the recitation of 250 paaths of Japu Ji Sahib; or
3. Completing six rosaries (108 beads) daily, for one month, of the Mool Mantra (from Ik Oankaar to hosee bhee sach).

Thus, those who even could not read Gurmukhi or have access to Guru Granth Sahib, could obtain this merit. This way every month several hundred and sometimes thousands of paaths of Guru Granth Sahib were distributed among devotees from remote corners of Punjab[32].

In September 1940 Baba Ji went to Lehra. A large number of devotees from adjoining villages came to pay their respect. Many devotees requested for the *seva* of bringing food for Baba Ji, but he accepted the service of two brothers, Bhai Kehar Singh and Bhai Kapur Singh. It is noteworthy that these two brothers were very small farmers and they were humble and honest. With the income from their farm they could hardly make both ends meet but they always shared the fruits of their toil with those who were in even greater need. Baba Ji in his discourses gave their example and said that they were like Bhai Lalo.

A few days before the birth anniversary (Gurpurab) of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, Baba Ji went to Nanakana Sahib and on a request from the management committee stayed at the Gurdwara land outside the city where water was available. The Shiromani Akali Dal had decided to have a grand procession on the occasion with Master Tara Singh, the president, riding an elephant. When the organizers came and requested Baba Ji to join the procession, he humbly replied that to participate in any political activity was against his principles. He said, "I have come here only to supplicate before Guru Nanak for getting my sins forgiven". Then the organizers requested Baba Ji to send his group of Ragis. Baba Ji said he would think over it. But after they had gone, Baba Ji said, "It does not look good that Master Tara Singh is riding on an elephant and the Ragis are singing Keertan after him". As a result Baba Ji decided not to participate in the procession and left Nanakana Sahib the same night and reached Baagh where he celebrated the Gurpurab.

A few days after the Gurpurab Baba Ji left for Nanaksar. Before leaving, however, he instructed Sardar Jaswant Singh and his brothers that within the compound of the new Gurdwara Akhand Paaths should continue and that a large quantity of rations (sufficient for several hundred people for a few weeks) must be kept in the fortress because one could never tell when it would be needed (At that time no one understood the significance of this advice but in 1947 when all the Hindu and Sikh families of the town came within the fortress, people remembered what Baba Ji had said seven years before). At that time someone said to Baba Ji that the other Gurdwara in the town was being renovated in order to enlarge the congregation hall. Baba Ji said, "All these Gurdwaras will be used by Muslims".

In the year 1941 Baba Ji, for some reason of his own did not go to Damdama Sahib on Baisakhi celebration but stayed in Jhorara. Soon afterwards he went to Karol hill on a request from the Raj Mata of Patiala. Among the large number of devotees who came to pay their homage was also a young boy only 15 years of age. His name was Kundan Singh and he belonged to the village 'Gujjar Singh Wala'. He had seen Baba Ji once before when he was herding the cows of his family and Baba Ji happened to be staying in the neighbouring village. Because of some good deed of previous birth, on seeing Baba Ji, he decided to devote his life in spiritual pursuit. He therefore refused to get married and followed Baba Ji to Karol hill. Baba Ji was also pleased to see him and gracefully accepted him to join as his *sevadar*. Gradually his selfless service and humility bore fruit and after Baba Ishar Singh Ji left for heavenly abode he was entrusted with the *seva* of Guru Granth Sahib that Baba Nand Singh Ji and Baba Ishar Singh Ji personally used to do. In 1950 he took over the over all management responsibility of the Nanaksar Thaath.

Suddenly one day Baba Ji had the langar *seva* by the Maharaja of Patiala stopped and asked all the devotees and *sevadars* present there to arrange for their own langar. He said that by consuming the langar provided by someone else one shared the sins of the provider. One therefore had to do meditation and recitation of Naam and Gurbani to pay for these sins. Thus he asked everyone to participate in the recitation of Guru Granth Sahib.

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[32] The real purpose of Baba Nand Singh Ji was to have every devotee get involved in recitation of Naam and Gurbani.

From Karol hill Baba Nand Singh Ji went to Dehradoon and selected a Bungalow for staying that was a few miles from the town. It belonged to the widow of one Mr. Aggarwal, who gladly gave the place free of charge for six months. During the war which was still going on, a prisoner-of-war camp had been established by the Government of India that was a couple of miles from this bungalow. About 1500 German and Italian prisoners of war were kept in this camp. Groups of these prisoners were allowed to go for walk every afternoon to return in the evening. One day a German prisoner, who knew a little English language, met one of the devotees while he (the devotee) was collecting some medicinal plants in the jungle. On talking to this devotee he expressed desire to see Baba Ji. The devotee brought him to Baba Ji. He bowed and sat down and Baba Ji asked him if he meditated on God. The prisoner answered in affirmative. Then Baba Ji gave him a rosary and some fruits and asked him to continue on his meditation. On returning to the camp he described his encounter with the Indian holy man. After that several prisoners started coming. All were very happy to visit there and receive the "Karah Prasad" and langar. After a few days their chief priest also came and spent some time having a brief conversation with Baba Ji and went praising his high spiritual level.

One day Baba Ji went for a long walk beyond Nanda Post towards a small village called Sela Khoohee. He stopped at a bungalow and asked the watchman if there was a village Sherpur near by. The watchman pointed in a direction and said that it was only over a mile from there. Baba Ji went and met a person outside the village whom he asked if a particular Brahmin still lived in the village. The man replied in affirmative. Baba Ji then told the story of his youth when he had come there to meditate in the deep forest and had met the Brahmin who had warned him saying, "Do not stay in this jungle, youngman; because at night a tiger comes here". But Baba Ji had ignored his warning and stayed there for quite some time under a particular banyan tree. The old Brahmin was amazed to see him unharmed and had said, "This boy has some spiritual powers". Baba Ji sent for the Brahmin who came and after Baba Ji told him who he was recognized him and was extremely happy that Baba Ji had not forgotten him.

During this stay many local Hindus became Baba Ji's devotees whom

he enjoined to recite the Mool Mantra. Some Arya Samajis did not like this and instigated the land lady to get her bungalow vacated lest the Sikh Sant took the possession of the place. Baba Ji came to know of this and before she said anything, moved to a place near the village Paonda where he stayed for a few weeks before moving to Delhi. On the way he stopped overnight at the Gurdwara of the Sikh platoon at Roorkee cantonment and gave a gurbani discourse in the morning congregation meeting. The British commander came and profusely thanked Baba Ji to give such an inspiring spiritual sermon to the Sikh jawans.

At Delhi Baba Ji picked a spot near Wazirabad pumping station across the Jamuna River to stay and went to pay his homage at Gurdwara "Majnoo Tilla". After a few days the Rajguru of Dhaulpur state came with a group of sants and had a long spiritual discussion. A few days later the prime minister of the state also came to pay his respect. Baba Ji celebrated Guru Nanak Dev Ji's Gurpurab, which fell on November 3, with great enthusiasm. Many renowned Ragis came from all over Punjab to participate in this celebration. A couple of days after this Baba Ji decided to leave Delhi for Nanaksar. Before leaving he gave blessings to the boatman who had been taking the devotees free of charge across the river throughout Baba Ji's stay there.

If at any place during the stay of Baba Ji any unpleasant episode occurred, he considered it the doing of evil forces of "Kaljug" who wished to create disturbance in the calm and peaceful atmosphere that was being created by Keertan and recitation of Naam. One such incident happened while Baba Ji was staying at Nanaksar (Kaleraan). Some burglars broke into the house of one of his devotees and stole a large sum of money. The police under the command of S. Narinder Singh D.S.P., who happened to be one of Baba Ji's devotees, followed the burglars and caught up with them. In the ensuing encounter, five burglars were killed and one captured. One of the burglars was found to belong to Kaleraan village. Baba Ji took it as an assault by the evil forces and told all his devotees to ward off the bad time by recitation of Gurbani. His firm belief was that all calamities could be annulled by meditation and recitation of Gurbani and Akaal Purakh's Name.

After celebrating the Baisakhi of 1942 at Damdama Sahib Baba Ji went to Nagrota[33], a small town located at a short distance from Palampur. He stayed at the tea garden of Maharaja of Patiala, about six miles from the town. He asked some devotees to go find a fountain which the manager of the garden had seen in his dream and where according to him Guru Nanak Dev Ji had taken a bath. The group of devotees, however, came back empty handed after searching the area for some time. Baba Ji then said, "Akaal Purakh will Himself show us the place". In a short while a large white snake appeared. Baba Ji started following it saying that the one to show us the spot has arrived. The snake reached a fountain and disappeared. The manager when saw the place confirmed that it was the place he had seen in his dream. Baba Ji got a make-shift tub dug from where water could be taken for drinking and cooking. The overflowing water was used for taking bath.

Soon a small hermitage was constructed according to Baba Ji's instructions at some distance from the fountain. It included a covered area for congregation and two caves, one each for Guru Granth Sahib and Baba Ji.

While at Nagrota Baba Ji put all his companions and close devotees through a difficult test[34]. Suddenly for the first time the langar became very simple and barely enough. Then he asked the Ragis to leave because they had developed ego. The Ragis left the 'Thaath" but did not leave the area. They roamed about in the jungle for four days sustaining themselves on leaves and roots. Then they came back and begged for Baba Ji's forgiveness and were accepted.

One day Sant Sujan Singh Ji (the famous Ragi and one of the foremost devotees of Baba Ji), who had left Dehradoon without Baba Ji's permission (because for a long time Baba Ji had refused to give him permission to go home) came back. But Baba Ji would not let him come

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[33] Before leaving for Nagrota Baba Ji had sent some of his close devotees to go in that area and pick an appropriate spot to spend the summer. He also asked them to go to Mandi and see the "Rabab" of the tenth Master and bring a drawing of the same. Later on a Rabab of exact those dimensions was ordered from a famous manufacturer at Lahore.

[34] This was the year 1942 and in 1943 Baba Ji discarded his human frame to merge into the Infinite. May be, before leaving, he wanted to test and pass all his companions so that when they go to the court of Akaal Purakh they are given an honourable seat.

to the congregation (because he still had ego that because of his art of Keertan Baba Ji would call him in). Finally he assumed humility and begged for forgiveness when Baba Ji accepted him back with some advice (mixed with mild rebuke) that in order to succeed in the realm of spirituality one had to shun ego and try not to run after wealth. Then he gave a lot of blessings to Sant Sujan Singh Ji.

One day a group of about forty Naamdhaari Sikhs came in the congregation. They told that they had come in that area in search of a safe place in the hills. When Baba Ji asked them why were they so much in fear; they quoted Sau Sakhi (attributed to Guru Gobind Singh Ji) wherein there was a mention of a holocaust. Therefore they were looking for a place around Rawaalsar to stay safe. Baba Ji asked, "Will you stay alive if you come and live in this area"? He then advised them to take the refuge of *Akaal Purakh's Naam* instead of wasting time looking for a safe place and running away from death.

One day a landlord of the area came along with his brother, who was the superintendent of police of the district, to see Baba Ji. He was a devout Muslim who spent a lot of his time in meditation. Baba Ji talked to him for about an hour and answered all his questions concerning attainment of peace of mind. When he came out of the room he said, "I have met with many famous fakirs and sants but have never seen one like Baba Nand Singh Ji who has removed all my doubts within such a short time". Similarly one day the head mistress of a local high school came with her mother to see Baba Ji. She was, however, such a staunch Arya Samajist that she did not bow before Guru Granth Sahib and sat in the back row of the congregation. Sant Sujan Singh Ji was doing keertan at that time. He received a telepathic message from Baba Ji and sang the shabad of Bhagat Namdev:

ਤਾਰੀਲੇ ਗਨਿਕਾ ਬਿਨੁ ਰੂਪ ਕੁਬਿਜਾ ਬਿਆਧਿ ਅਜਾਮਲੁ ਤਾਰੀਅਲੇ॥

Then Baba Ji gave a discourse on Bhagti and Akaal Purakh's kindness on all those who had unquestioned devotion to Him irrespective of caste or creed. Suddenly the head mistress rose and prostrated on the ground and stayed there for a long time before getting up (Baba Ji must have touched upon a sensitive nerve of hers during his discourse).

On the Pooranmashi that fell in July of 1942, *Khande di Pauhul* was administered in which Sant Lachhman Das Nirban also expressed desire to be a recipient[35]. However, because he still had some residual ego left, he asked the Panj Piaaras (the five beloved ones) who were going to administer the Pauhul that he should be administered the Pauhul separately and alone (probably to save himself from drinking Amrit from the same bowl as all other recipients). When Baba Ji heard of this he castigated Lachhman Das who begged for forgiveness and joined all other recipients to take the Pauhul.

While at Nagrota Baba Ji perceived that Bhai Santa Singh, the head Ragi in his entourage, was suffering from the great maladies of lust and ego. According to him (Baba Ji) the only cure for these maladies was humility and *seva*. He therefore told Bhai Santa Singh to leave his entourage, go on foot to Amritsar, acquire an earthen pot used on a Persian wheel, tie it around his neck and scrape into it the bird droppings and other rubbish from the parikarma of Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple). Bhai Santa Singh half-heartedly agreed to obey Baba Ji's order. He went to Amritsar and started scraping the bird droppings as he was told. In the beginning he humbly performed this *seva*, but soon many people started bowing before him for what he was doing with such devotion to Guru Ram Das Ji. This rekindled his ego and he started posing himself as a Sant. As a result he went away from Baba Ji and died a miserable death.

After the Pooranmashi of July 27, 1942 Baba Ji left Nagrota for Nanaksar. On the way the car carrying Guru Granth Sahib met with an accident near Jalandhar cantonment. As a result Baba Ji stayed there for three days and then moved on to Nanaksar.

In January 1943 about one hundred devotees from Amritsar under the leadership of *Chaudhary Jiwan Singh* (of Bhai Chattar Singh Jiwan Singh Booksellers) started for Kaleraan to attend the Sangat of Pooranmashi. They wanted to reach there as soon as possible. Therefore they did not stop anywhere on the way to have food. That evening Baba Ji told one of his close devotees (Sardar Narinder Singh D.S.P.), "A group of devotees is arriving who would be very hungry. Immediately go and make arrangement for their food". The devotee went to Moga and within a few hours came back with a large amount of sumptuous food and Karah Prasad. The group had already reached Nanaksar but no one could sleep because of hunger. It was very early in the morning when the food was served by Baba Ji himself who was very pleased with the whole arrangement.

A couple of days after the Pooranmashi when most of the devotees were ready to depart, Baba Ji gave a hint that he would soon be departing for Akaal Purakh's abode. He added, "I am only a humble servant of Akaal Purakh and bow to His order. Now I have received the order and have to abide by his will. Who knows if I will see all or any of you again". Then he gave permission to all the devotees to return to their homes with his blessings.

Soon after the Pooranmashi of February, 1943 Baba Ji again talked about his departure from this world. He started having some health problem which was diagnosed to be colon cancer . He said, "I have received a call from Akaal Purakh to come to Him but have requested for a few more days because a large number of devotees are coming from far off places". All the devotees present started crying. At this Baba Ji said, "I was sent by Akaal Purakh for the purpose of setting up a religious code. I have done that and am pleased that you all have been abiding by it. Now continue observing it and you will attain liberation".

The very next day Baba Ji's condition worsened and it became obvious that the end was not to far away. All devotees present requested Baba Ji to postpone his departure. Baba Ji said, "If you want me among you for some more time then you should supplicate before Akaal Purakh for that. I am only a lowly servant of His and cannot do anything by myself". Immediately all the devotees stood up before Guru Granth Sahib and begged in their supplication (Ardaas) to grant some more time to Baba Ji to stay with them. When after the supplication the commandment (Vaak) was read from Guru Granth Sahib, it came:

ਪਿੰਗੁਲ ਪਰਬਤ ਪਾਰਿ ਪਰੇ ਖਲ ਚਤੁਰ ਬਕੀਤਾ॥ (SGGS, p.809)

Baba Ji then said, "Your supplication has been accepted and I have been given six more months of life to serve the Sangat. Now all of you must increase your time of meditation and recitation of Guru Granth Sahib. Immediately all the devotees present raised their hands and pledged, according to their capacity and ability, to either do or have done Paaths of Guru Granth Sahib. One of the devotees pledged 101 Akhand Paaths of Guru Granth Sahib and got them started the very next day. Baba Ji then left for Dehradoon and stayed there for almost five months near Paonda village.

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[35] Sant Lachhman Das was an ascetic who lived in an hermitage in Shivalak Hills. He possessed some occult powers also. A tiger was known to often visit his hermitage. He became a devotee of Baba Ji after seeing and listening to him.

In May Baba Ji asked one of his close devotees (Kavi Ji), who was a factory owner, to design and manufacture the prototype of a craft that could be used as a palanquin, a vehicle on the road and as a boat in water. He then added, "Your first attempt may not be a success but in your second attempt you will be able to fabricate the structure that I am thinking of ". Kavi Ji, with the help of a draftsman and some artisans in his factory soon succeeded (in their second attempt) in putting together an eight feet long structure that approximately met with the requirements of Baba Ji, who was very pleased to see it[36].

After the Pooranmashi of June most of the devotees left for their homes. Baba Ji then sent messages to some of them to come back soon, thus implicitly indicating that they should take advantage of whatever time was left to get benefit of his company. Some fortunate ones who came back at the next Pooranmashi saw Baba Ji for the last time while those who could not come, because of their jobs or family affairs, were deprived of his last 'Darshan' and had to regret the rest of their life.

At Dehradoon, from the day to day talk, all companions and visiting devotees perceived that very soon Baba Ji would no longer be there among them. In mid-August of 1943, Baba Ji started having fever therefore after taking the permission of Guru Granth Sahib he left Dehradoon on 26th of August and went to Nanaksar. He stopped on the way for the night and in spite of high fever, according to his routine, took a bath at 12:30 AM and completed his Nitnem (daily routine of Gurbani Recitation) and meditation. The entourage reached Nanaksar the next evening. The next morning Akhand Paaths were started for Baba Ji's recovery. However, with the passage of time his condition went on deteriorating. On the evening of 28th August it became evident that the end was near when Baba Ji said, "If I owe anyone anything, now is the time to get it back because I want to leave here with all my accounts having been paid". At that time all close devotees were informed through telegrams about the condition of Baba Ji. When early next morning the Ragis came to start Keertan, Baba Ji said, "Hurry up and start with the tune of "Tuhee Nirankaar". The Ragis started the tune and at the conclusion as they were about to begin the regular Keertan, Baba Ji uttered four times, wah, wah, wah, wah, and the fifth time the breath went in but did not come out.

As already described, quite sometime before discarding his human body Baba Ji had started giving explicit indication that he was soon going to merge into Akaal Purakh. He himself gave the outline of the craft (casket), its shape and desired functions, in which his body was to be carried for immersion. He had told that his body was not to be cremated but put into water. He even had said that the immersion of his body should be done at Sidhwan wharf in Satluj River at a certain spot in spite of suggestions by some devotees to have it done elsewhere on the pretext that water was not deep enough at that particular spot.

It is interesting to note here that almost a year before he left for Akaal Purakh's abode, Baba Ji had asked one Bibi Charan Kaur of Delhi to spin yarn and weave about forty yards of fabric for him. Bibi Charan Kaur did so with great devotion and was ready to take it to Nanaksar when she heard the news of Baba Ji's passing away. She immediately left for Nanaksar and brought the fabric all of which was used for lining the craft in which Baba Ji's body was placed and immersed in water.

When devotees from Amritsar heard the news they immediately chartered a bus and under the co-leadership of *Chaudhary Jiwan Singh and Bhagat Bhagwan Das started for Nanaksar.* Those days because of the war gasoline was in short supply and most of the buses ran on the so called gas plant which burned coke and the carbon monoxided thus generated mixed with oxygen was used as fuel. On the way around midnight the engine developed some trouble and the bus stopped. The driver and his helper (cleaner) tried for over an hour but could not detect the fault and told that everyone had to find a place in the nearby village to pass the night ; they would bring a mechanic from the town in the morning. All devotees were disappointed that they might miss the last 'Darshan' of Baba Ji, when Bhagat Bhagwan Das told everyone to join with him in a supplication to Guru Nanak Dev Ji to help solve their problem. Everyone stood up while Bhagat Bhagwan Das humbly supplicated to Guru Nanak to help them reach Nanaksar in time before the start of the funeral procession of Baba Ji. After the supplication he asked everyone to sit in the bus and asked the driver to start the engine. To the amazement of everyone the engine started and the bus reached Nanaksar at 4:00 in the morning - quite sometime before the funeral procession started.

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[36] Although at that time no one knew why Baba Ji was so particular about this special craft, when he merged into the infinite his body was placed in a craft similar (but slightly modified) in design to this one. It was carried, with Baba Ji's body in it, like a palanquin up to the car in which it was taken near the quay. Then it was hitched to a station wagon and taken to the quay where it was attached to a boat and taken in water and finally immersed.

FUNERAL PROCESSION

After the conclusion of the morning congregational meeting preparations were made to take the body for immersion in the river (Satluj). On August 31, 1943, at about 10 AM, Baba Ji's body which until then was placed in an open space for the devotees to have the last 'Darshan', was brought out of the compound of the hermitage (Kuttiya) in a palanquin, placed in an open top car and the procession started from Nanaksar. Four cars with Ragi Jathas followed this car and then there were innumerable cars, buses, trucks and devotees on foot which formed a very large procession. A large number of devotees who could not reach Nanaksar in time started joining the procession as it proceeded. It soon swelled to over 100,000 devotees. Throughout the way singing of Gurbani shabads and slogans of praise of Baba Ji resounded.

A short distance from the quay the procession stopped. Beyond this point only cars carrying the Ragis were allowed to follow the station wagon to which the casket with the body was hitched. Everyone else got down from their vehicles and followed on foot. On reaching the river the palanquin was taken out of the car and placed under a tree for a couple of hours so that the devotees who could not reach Nanaksar in time could have the last Darshan. After that, as Baba Ji had left instructions, the palanquin was tied to a boat, taken to where the water was deep and then let sink. The Ragis sang the shabad:

ਸੂਰਜ ਕਿਰਣਿ ਮਿਲੇ ਜਲ ਕਾ ਜਲੁ ਹੂਆ ਰਾਮ ॥

After the conclusion of the Keertan, Sohila was recited and the last supplication was said. By then it was evening when, with heavy hearts, all devotees returned to Nanaksar, with a feeling, deep down, that they had lost something most precious and irreplaceable in their life.

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Baba Ishar Singh Ji Raare Waale

SANT ISHAR SINGH JI RAAṚEWAALE

Aug.5, 1905----Aug.26, 1975

About ten miles from the city of Patiala a small village called Allowal is located. In this village a prominent Sikh family headed by Bhai Ram Singh lived at the turn of the ninth century. Bhai Ram Singh was the '*numberdar*' (representative of the government to collect the land revenue tax) of the village. Because of his even temper and immaculate conduct Bhai Ram Singh commanded great respect from all who came in contact with him. He was a very generous person with deep religious convictions. Therefore he was always in the fore front to serve any holy person (Sant) who visited the village. His wife, Bibi Ratan Kaur, was equally devout and generous lady who always encouraged her husband to take part in religious and philanthropic projects.

Once a Sant came to the village and stayed for a few days in the village hermitage (Kuttiaa). Bhai Ram Singh and Bibi Ratan Kaur, as usual served him with devotion by providing food and looking after his comfort. On the day Sant Ji was ready to depart he called Ram Singh, gave him a rose and said, "Take this flower and keep it in your house. A blessed soul is due to arrive in your family who will spread his spiritual fragrance all over like this rose". Bhai Ram Singh was overjoyed and rushed home to tell this happy news to his wife.

Time went by and the words of the Sant were forgotten. After a couple of years, on August 5,1905, a baby boy was born to Mata Ratan Kaur. After an appropriate period (forty days according to the tradition) the baby was taken to the village Gurdwara where according to the Sikh rites the name Gulab Singh was given to him. A Brahmin was then called to prepare the horoscope of the boy. After he prepared the horoscope and carefully studied it, the Brahmin said, "This boy will be a great man either in the political or the spiritual realm".

It is generally believed that blessed souls bring good fortune and happiness to the families in which they are born. This seemed very true in the case of Gulab Singh whose birth accompanied enhancement in the wealth and prestige of Bhai Ram Singh's family.

Bhai Ram Singh had great expectations from his son. He wanted Gulab Singh to become a high official in the state of Patiala like some of his relatives and friends who occupied very high positions in the Patiala Government. With this thought in mind he wanted to give appropriate education to his son.

After finishing the primary school in the village Gulab Singh was sent to the highly regarded Model School in Patiala. He was not only a very bright student who excelled in his studies but also one of the top athletes in his class. Soon he was selected to the district field hockey team. He was also a very handsome young boy with pleasant manners. Therefore everyone expected that one day he would be successful in life according to the expectations of his parents and prediction of the Brahmin.

Being a student of Model School where only the children belonging to affluent families could afford to enrol, one would expect that Gulab Singh would spend his spare time in enjoying life with his peers. But, on the contrary, his aptitude was more towards seeking the company of holy persons (Sants) and singing with the congregation in the Gurdwara. He regularly went to the Gurdwara in the morning as well as evening and joined the group who sang Gurbani Shabads. Whenever he found some spare time he went to Sant Santokh Das, a very knowledgeable ascetic who lived nearby, or to the famous hermit, Dhiana Ji to listen their spiritual discourses.

Dhiana Ji liked this promising youth very much because of his pleasing manners and deep interest in learning things spiritual. Contrary to his usual habit of talking very little, Dhiana Ji soon started talking to young Gulab Singh on his personal interests and goals and started advising him on various matters. One day while discussing the subject of a spiritual guide Dhiana Ji said, "You will get your spiritual satisfaction from a holy person living by the side of a canal". Not too long after this conversation, a relative visited Bhai Gulab Singh's family for a few days. In several discussions on various Sants he spoke very highly of Sant Attar Singh of Reru Sahib. He also suggested to Bhai Ram Singh to visit this holy person. On asking the address of the Dera at Reru Sahib Bhai Gulab Singh

was surprised to find that it was on the bank of a canal. At that time he remembered the prediction of Baba Dhiana. Bhai Gulab Singh told this to some of his friends who had similar spiritual leanings. They all decided to visit this holy person whose Dera was 'on the bank of a canal', at Reru Sahib (Rampur).

Sometime when God becomes graceful He creates opportunities which pave the way to the goal that He Himself has set for a fortunate person. This seems to be the case with Bhai Gulab Singh. Sant Bishan Singh of Rauni, who was one of the top devotees of Sant Attar Singh of Reru Sahib, once happened to meet Bhai Gulab Singh. He saw that the young man possessed a strong aptitude for spiritual pursuits. He suggested to Gulab Singh that for fulfilment of his mind's inner desire he should visit Reru Sahib.

Hira Singh, who was a soldier in the state gunnery, was a close friend of Bhai Gulab Singh. He also had similar spiritual leaning. One day Bhai Gulab Singh mentioned to Hira Singh the few incidents that had recently happened with him and expressed a desire to visit Reru Sahib. Hira Singh, who had recently been sick with typhoid and was recovering, immediately agreed to accompany Gulab Singh in spite of his still weak physical condition.

Those days the means of transportation to go to a place like Reru Sahib, which was located away from any main road or railway line, were not easily available. However, these two youngmen had made up their minds. After some difficulties they reached Rampur and went straight to Reru Sahib Gurdwara and met Baba Attar Singh Ji. After paying their obeisance they sat down. Baba Ji said, "Hira Singh, you are on leave for three days only, therefore you have to go back. However, this youngman (Gulab Singh), whom it seems to me as if I know for a long time, may not like to go with you". Bhai Gulab Singh then said with folded hands, "Sir, I have come here for the first time, but if you are kind to me I would consider myself fortunate to get the opportunity to serve you for the rest of my life". Baba Ji smiled and asked both of them to take some rest after such a tough journey before talking about his duty at the Dera.

The same evening the two friends were administered *Khande di Pauhul* on the order of Baba Ji who then explained to them the Rehit

Maryada (The Sikh code of conduct) and then conferred upon Gulab Singh the new name of Ishar Singh and said, "With the grace of Satguru, today I have made you from Gulab (rose) to Ishar (God). Now it is up to you to live up to your new name. I pray to Satguru to give you capacity and ability to live up to it". The words of Baba Attar Singh Ji had a profound effect on Bhai Gulab Singh. He felt as if he had taken a new birth in which the only purpose was to contemplate Akaal Purakh and serve humanity.

After a few days when Bhai Ishar Singh (formerly Gulab Singh) returned to Patiala every one was amazed to see the transformation in his person. His walk, talk and conduct had completely changed. He stopped spending time in purposeless gossip with friends; stayed awake till late in the night and got up very early in the morning, spending all the time in meditation and recitation of Naam. He even forgot that he had to study his books because the examinations were approaching. The result was that he did not pass the examination. This, however, did not in any way disappoint him because he realized that his progress in the spiritual realm was more than satisfactory.

Now he started going to Reru Sahib every month, sometime alone and sometime with a group of devotees. In July of 1922 he accompanied a group of devotees from Patiala to visit Reru Sahib. This time Sant Baba Attar Singh Ji showed special interest in this group. While talking to them before the evening congregational meeting he said, "I would like to have a dedicated person from this group who is ready to devote his whole life for the Guru's service". Bhai Ishar Singh immediately got up and humbly offered himself. Baba Ji smiled and said, "This path is very arduous, you will have to give up all luxuries of life including silk clothes and expensive shoes and start living in coarse attire like an ascetic". Ishar Singh replied, "Sir, I have now taken a vow to dedicate my life to serve God and you; I therefore accept all the conditions in order to fulfil this vow of mine". Baba Ji was pleased to see such humility and conviction and said, "From today onwards you are being given the duties of my personal attendant (pitcher carrier)". So saying he called Bhai Nahar Singh, his personal attendant, and asked him to give to Ishar Singh his (Baba Ji's) coarse blanket, watch and the (metallic) pitcher. Ishar Singh was then given some coarse clothes to wear and a pair of simple shoes

made of tanned hide. From that day a new life began for Ishar Singh, a prerequisite for which was to completely break away from the family.

Even though a good athlete and a strong youngman, Ishar Singh belonged to an affluent family and was brought up in a life of luxury. The new duty of personal *'sevadar'* of Baba Attar Singh Ji was too strenuous for him. Soon his body started getting weak and at times he even started experiencing minor tremors. In spite of this the strong-willed Ishar Singh paid no heed to his physical problems and remained steadfast in the duties given to him.

The daily routine of Sant Baba Attar Singh Ji was as follows:

> At 11:00 P.M. sharp he started from the Gokha pond, where he spent most of his time in meditation, to go to the Dera. Only with a slight tinkling of his metallic pitcher he warned his personal attendant that he was ready to leave. Thus the attendant had to be extremely alert. At the Dera he rested until 1:30 A.M., when he got up and after brushing his teeth took a bath with one hundred ten buckets of water (at least two persons were needed to draw so much water from the well) and at the same time he then started chanting his morning prayers. After this he walked back to the pond where he sat in meditation till sunrise when he moved back to the Dera where he spent the day in the congregation and seeing the large number of devotees that daily visited from various parts of the country. The personal *sevadar*, however, was supposed to stay alert throughout the day to attend to any need of Baba Ji without any delay. After evening prayers he took a light meal and went to the pond where he meditated until 11:00 P.M.

After some time another young devotee, Kishan Singh, came from Patiala with the intention of spending the rest of his life in the *seva* of Baba Attar Singh Ji and got accepted by Baba Ji as a Sevadar at the Dera. Since Kishan Singh and Ishar Singh were of the same age, Baba Ji warned that they must not waste their time in small talk and instead make it useful by contemplating Akaal Purakh.

After some time Baba Attar Singh Ji went on a pilgrimage to Hazoor Sahib with some of his devotees and sevadars. At the same time another Sant Ji was also visiting there with his entourage which included some ladies also. One morning the two groups started walking together from their lodging places towards the sanctum sanctorium of the main shrine. At that time Ishar Singh started a shabad which symbolically implied that one should stay away from Maya. But the wording was such that it could be mistaken as hurtful to the feelings of women folk. Baba Attar Singh Ji later on advised Ishar Singh that one must not under any circumstances hurt the feelings of anyone.

After returning from Hazoor Sahib one day Baba Attar Singh Ji suddenly decided to leave Rampur and go to the Saidoo village near Hoti Mardan (near the monument of Baba Karam Singh Ji). On reaching there he pitched his tent on the bank of the river Indus and started a routine of intense meditation. His fame soon spread in the adjoining areas and a large number of devotees including Pathans (Muslims) also started coming to pay their homage.

Suddenly one day he let it be known to his close devotees that soon he would be leaving this world to go to his celestial abode. Soon after this, one day he asked a devotee to have two ascetic robes (kafnees) stitched, one for himself and one for Bhai Ishar Singh. When the robes arrived he took Ishar Singh alone to the monument of Baba Karam Singh Ji and said a supplication to Guru Nanak in which he said, "Sat Guru Nanak Dev Ji and Baba Karam Singh Ji, I am going to have Bhai Ishar Singh put on the ascetic robe; my humble request is to kindly shower your grace on him so he proves himself to be worthy of this garb". Then he gave the Kafni to Bhai Ishar Singh and said, "I have done all I could to enhance your spiritual level. Now all depends on you. My prayers are with you that you may progress from here to become a true Gurmukh and devotee of Guru Nanak". Thus Bhai Ishar Singh became Sant Ishar Singh on that day. After some time, as he had predicted, Baba Attar Singh Ji discarded his mortal body to merge in Akaal Purakh.

After the rites of passage of Baba Ji, Sant Ishar Singh recalled the words of advice that Baba Ji had given before departing:

1. Depend only on Akaal Purakh and no one else.
2. Never speak a harsh word that could hurt someone's feeling.
3. Never get into argument with egoists who think they are superior in knowledge because of their education.

4. Always stay in ascending spirits (*Chardi Kala*).
5. Have unshakeable faith in the power of spiritual knowledge and contemplation of *Naam*.

According to the tradition, after the performance of last rites the senior sevadar, Sant Ishar Singh was tied the ceremonial turban and thus got the responsibility of management of the Dera and Bhai Kishan Singh, according to the wish of Baba Ji, became his personal sevadar. Sant Ishar Singh was, however, destined to take a different direction in his life rather than managing the Dera. He soon got tired of keeping accounts of income and expenses of the Dera and passed them on to some of the *sevadars* of the *Dera*. Himself, one day he picked three items given to him by Baba Attar Singh Ji (a coarse blanket, a pocket watch and a metallic pitcher), took Bhai Kishan Singh with him and left on a pilgrimage tour of Gurdwaras in Punjab. He first went to Anandpur Sahib and from there to Amritsar, visiting all historic Gurdwaras on the way.

Sant Bishan Singh of Rauni, who was a senior disciple of Baba Attar Singh Ji, sought out Sant Ishar Singh and tried to persuade him to settle down at one place and from there spread the word of Guru Nanak. He suggested several places that he felt could be suitable for this purpose. Finally a small forest outside the town of Raṛa was suggested which Sant Ishar Singh liked. So both Sant Ishar Singh and Bhai Kishan Singh came to stay there. Their routine was to come to the Gurdwara of village Raṛa in the evening, do Keertan, eat in the langar and return to the forest where they spent the rest of the time until next evening in meditation.

This routine continued for a couple of weeks. Then the two felt that going to the Gurdwara to get food was not good. From that day they stopped going to the town. For four days they stayed hungry in the forest, spending all their time in meditation, when in the town people started wondering what happened to the two Sants. Soon their whereabouts were discovered and when the town people realized that they had been without food or water for four days, food and water was rushed to where they were sitting. They ate very little and distributed whatever was left to the visiting devotees. The next morning again plenty of food arrived and with the passing of each day the number of visiting devotees and the quantity of food brought by them kept on increasing. But the two Sants ate very little (at breakfast, lunch and dinner) and spent most of their time meditating. Also they did not talk to the visiting devotees.

At night they slept under some tree for a few hours, got up at 2:00 in the morning and went to the nearby canal where after taking bath they sat down in meditation till the day break when they returned to the forest.

Soon the fame of these two holy men spread all over the district. A large number of people started coming in order to see these blessed beings. Because of the increasing number of devotees and the approaching rainy season the devotees felt that it was necessary to have some kind of shelter where the two could sit and meditate during rain or dust storms. It was also felt that a room for Guru Granth Sahib should also be there for the devotees to have congregational meetings and Keertan. Soon a room for the two Sants and a hall for Guru Granth Sahib and congregational meetings were constructed.

The very strenuous routine of intense meditation for extended hours, intake of very little food, and lack of sleep told upon the health of Sant Ishar Singh. He became so frail and weak that some close devotees started worrying about his well-being. Sardar Mohan Singh, a prominent contractor from New Delhi, took Sant Ishar Singh with him and put him under medical treatment of a famous physician of New Delhi, who with tender love and care brought Sant Ishar Singh back to normal health.

The devotion with which Mohan Singh and his wife served Sant Ji during his stay at their home for medical treatment was exemplary. Sant Ji was extremely pleased with them.

One day Mohan Singh requested Sant Ji to pray for the fulfilment of their only desire of a male heir; because even after several years of their marriage they were not blessed with a son. That day after the evening prayer (Rehras) Sant Ji humbly said in his supplication to Satguru to grant Mohan Singh the gift of a son. In due course of time a son was born to Mrs. Mohan Singh who, according to the Sikh tradition, was given the name Daljit Singh. Sant Ji after some time returned to his abode in the jungle near Raaṛa and the original large congregational gatherings of devotees started again.

Soon the fame of Sant Ishar Singh started spreading because often whatever he uttered turned out to be true. Everyone started saying that the light of Baba Attar Singh Ji had infused into him. As a result many old and close devotees of Baba Attar Singh Ji started coming to him. He framed his daily routine quite similar to that of Baba Ji. After the evening congregational meeting in which Sant Ishar Singh himself did Keertan and Gurbani discourses he took very light dinner and then proceeded to the nearby sand dunes with some of his close associates. He stayed there until eleven and then returned to Dera to take some rest. At one O' clock sharp he got up, took a bath and then sat in meditation. Those who stayed at the Dera were also supposed to sit around Sant Ji at this time, for meditation. The result of this tough routine was that only genuinely dedicated people stayed at the Dera. The freeloaders left after a day or two.

As the fame of Sant Ji spread and the number of devotees increased, some fundamentalists and other jealous persons stooped down to unthinkably deplorable acts. Rumours were spread that the religious practices of Sant Ishar Singh were not in conformity with the Sikh tenets. Some unprincipled antagonists once sent an intoxicated woman who tried to assault Sant Ji. But some devotees reached in time and prevented this. They were ready to punish the woman but Sant Ji said, "This was an act of God who wanted to test me. This woman is not responsible, so let her go". After this episode appropriate security measures were installed so no unauthorized person could reach the basement where Sant Ji was staying.

Another time some mischief mongers who wanted to grab the property of the Dera sent a woman to entice Sant Ji. She was a very crafty person who had planned to gradually approach Sant Ji and capture him in the net of her beauty and cunningness. However, after she studied the life and character of Sant Ishar Singh she realized that even to think ill of such an immaculate soul would be a cardinal sin. She repented and divulged the names of those who had sent her there.

In 1930 Sant Ishar Singh proposed the establishment of what he called a "Tapoban" or meditation forest - a place of solitude specifically for those who wanted to get involved in intense meditation and contemplation. When he expressed this idea to his close associates most of them showed great enthusiasm and volunteered to be included in such a group. A certain area around the meditation basement of Sant Ji was earmarked for this purpose. Small cubicles were constructed among the trees where all participants could meditate until 11:00 PM and again from 2:00 in the morning in winter. For summer an earthen platform was erected in the center and the whole area was encircled with barbed wire.

All these volunteer participants, who included some renowned Sants of the time like Baba Aaya Singh of Hoti Mardan and Baba Nahar Singh, came out of this enclave only for answering nature's call, taking a bath, or taking some light food, the rest of the time they stayed in meditation and contemplation. No one spoke with anyone else. In the evening congregational meetings everyone had to be present and very little time was given for sleep. A short period was earmarked to have discussions with Sant Ishar Singh to remove any doubts. Sant Ji placed special importance on cleanliness of both body and mind to succeed in spiritual quest.

One of Sant Ji's devotees, Giani Mehar Singh, who has written a short biography of Sant Ji, writes of his personal experience with Sant Ji:

> "After intense ascetic practice for years that included daily recitation of Japu Ji for over 100 times, living on very little food and sleeping for only two to three hours a day I did not achieve inner satisfaction. Then I went to various famous Sants of that time and sought their advice. However, the mind was still not under control. Fortunately I happened to come to Sant Ishar Singh's Dera. Sant Ji graciously granted me admission in the 'Tapoban". After only a few days of meditation in the company of so many holy people the mind started enjoying focusing on meditation. Then one morning Sant Ji by his touch made me aware of my inner self when I experienced the state of equipoise and actually heard the so called unstruck melody".

Gradually this relatively small place took the shape of a beautiful Dera. All buildings were constructed with sandy clay of reddish tinge which in the middle of green trees presented a beautiful scene. Within the precincts of the Dera cleanliness reigned supreme. Not a spec of trash could be seen. Landscaping was beautifully done. In front of Sant Ji's basement was a small lawn where he sat in the evening, listened to the questions of his disciples and devotees and removed their doubts.

At that time three historic days were celebrated with great fervour by holding whole night Keertan. These included Guru Nanak's birth day, Guru Gobind Singh's birthday and Sant Attar Singh's anniversary. Sant Ji himself did Keertan till 2:00 AM. Then he went and took a bath, recited his morning prayers and after a couple of hours joined the congregation again. Several thousand devotees came from all over the state to attend these celebrations and the Langar was kept open 24 hours a day. Thus at the Dera one not only got delicious food for one's stomach but also an equally wonderful food for the soul in the form of Keertan and Naam Simran. The Dera was a seminary where only those stayed who really wanted to learn the way to spiritual uplift and were ready to do whatever necessary to achieve this goal. The freeloaders could not cope with the strenuous routine and left in a day or two.

The fame of the Dera of Sant Ishar Singh started spreading far and wide and with this the number of devotees increased by leaps and bounds. This unexpected progress caused fear in the minds of the owners of the land that soon they would be compelled to give more land to the Dera. Therefore they started complaining about excessive construction and loss of some crops due to too many visitors who trampled freshly grown crops. Sant Ji decided to leave the place and go somewhere else like Haridwar. When the congregation of Katari village heard this they came to Sant Ji and offered an adequate piece of land on the bank of the adjoining canal for the Dera. The genuine love and devotion of the congregation of Katari compelled Sant Ji to accept this offer and he moved to this place which became his permanent abode and where the famous Dera, "Karamsar" now stands.

After having settled at Katari, Sant Ji made some changes in his routine. Now he started going to the adjoining towns on some functions whenever invited by devotees. This, however, did not in anyway change his daily routine of meditation. By his visits to the adjoining areas he brought many persons in the folds of Sikhi who had never visited a Gurdwara or listened to Gurbani before.

The celebration of the three days (mentioned earlier) continued for some time at this new place also; but it soon became evident that the routine of non-stop Keertan and langar for three days was not practical. It told upon the health of Sant Ishar Singh who had to spend most of his time sitting in the congregation and perform *Keertan* for several hours. Also Sant Kishan Singh had to stand long hours in the langar to see that everything went satisfactorily. Furthermore, the celebrations gradually took the shape of fairs instead of spiritual affairs. Many shopkeepers started opening their stalls and this brought some unwanted onlookers whose intentions were far from uplift of their spiritual level. Sant Ji discussed with his close devotees and decided that instead of three days these celebrations would be limited to one day and that too only during the day time. No stalls would be allowed and everyone would leave after the conclusion of the evening keertan.

In 1938 Sant Ji suddenly decided to visit Karachi (now in Pakistan). Those days an old lady known as "Maaee Mastanee" who was a devotee of Baba Attar Singh Ji and now had great faith in Sant Ishar Singh Ji, lived in Lahore (also in Pakistan). She was sick and bed-ridden and had one last desire of seeing Sant Ishar Singh Ji before she died. Her sons did not know what to do because she was too weak to be taken to the Dera at Raṛa Sahib. Suddenly one day Babu Rala Singh, a close companion of Sant Ji, knocked at her door and announced that Sant Ji while on his way to Karachi had stopped at Lahore station for a few hours and sent him to inform Maaee Mastanee's family. The whole family immediately went to the railway station and requested Sant Ji to come to their home so that the last wish of their mother was fulfilled. Sant Ji graciously acceded to their request and visited their home. Maaee Mastanee was overjoyed to see Sant Ji by the side of her bed and was fully satisfied when Sant Ji blessed her. Thus she breathed her last fully satisfied and remembering Akaal Purakh when her time arrived.

After moving to the new Dera (Karamsar) another major change in Sant Ishar Singh's life was observed. Now Sant Ji started administering *Khande-di-Pauhul* (Amrit) on every Sangrand (the first day of every month of Bikrami Samvat) as well as on every full moon night (Pooranmashi). His mode of conducting the ceremony of Amrit was novel in that not only those who were to take it had to be genuinely desirous and ready to lead their lives in accordance with the discipline of Rehit

Maryada (code of conduct of Khalsa) but the five Singhs who were to prepare and administer the Amrit were to be those who considered it a sacred chore and whose conduct in life was exemplary. Thus sincerity on both sides was an important prerequisite. The effect of Sant Ji's own immaculate conduct was that hundreds of people came on every specified day and took Amrit. It is estimated that Sant Ji was responsible for administering Khande-di-Pauhul to over half a million people during his life time. While administering Amrit Sant Ji particularly emphasised leading the life of a Gurmukh by adhering to the code of five K's of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, always stay mindful of the four taboos, meditate on Naam and have honest and clean conduct in day-to-day dealings. He believed that taking Amrit means starting a new life, all dedicated to the Guru.

One day the famous Sikh mystic Baba Nand Singh Ji of Kaleraan, while passing by Karamsar, stopped over for a few hours. Sant Ishar Singh gave him a warm welcome and great respect. The two had very fruitful exchange of spiritual ideas. Baba Nand Singh Ji, who was much senior in age remarked about Sant Ishar Singh Ji, "In spite of his young age he is quite advanced in spirituality".

Sant Ishar Singh did not believe in boons or curses. According to him the duty of a holy person was to meditate on Naam, pray for welfare of all and not waste time in dabbling with super-natural powers. Once while in Lahore, he went for a walk. On the way he saw a graveyard. He entered inside the compound and stopped in front of a grave. He stood there for quite some time with eyes closed. When he opened his eyes the attendant asked him the reason for such a long pause at that grave. Sant Ji said, "I was praying for the emancipation of this sinner".

In every Gurbani discourse Sant Ji stressed especially the point that one must have unshakeable faith in only one Akaal Purakh and not run around to every god, goddess and demi-god for fulfilment of one's worldly desires. He also exhorted to take good care of one's body (health) because only a healthy body can have a healthy mind with which one could meditate on the Supreme Being and achieve the goal of human life.

Sant Ji believed in and always preached that a devotee attains the same status as his preceptor on whom he focuses single-mindedly in his meditation. He then gave the example of Guru Angad Dev and Baba Buddha. Once Guru Angad Dev Ji asked Baba Buddha Ji what he thought of Guru Nanak? Baba Buddha replied, "I always considered Guru Nanak as a great man". Guru Angad Dev smiled and said, "You therefore became a great man too". Then in an answer to a similar question by Baba Buddha, Guru Angad Dev said, "I considered Guru Nanak as the personification of Akaal Purakh Himself. That is how I served him and meditated on him". Baba Buddha said, "Satguru Ji, you are right, Guru Nanak made you exactly whatever you thought of him, a Satguru".

Because of his immaculate conduct, his devotion to Akaal Purakh and intense meditation, a celestial light emanated from Sant Ishar Singh's person. One felt overwhelmed by the aura and presence of spiritual energy. This was the reason that every word that he spoke had a deep effect on listeners. He boldly spoke his mind to any and everyone without fear because he always spoke the truth and never had an axe to grind. According to him an honest living, sharing with less fortunate human beings and service of humanity were the attributes of best meditation.

In the summer of 1938 the inspector of schools of the region, who was a Muslim, came to the Dera. He was a descendent of the famous Sufi Faqir, Bulleh Shah, and like his great great grand father an open-minded person. He wanted to learn about 'Truth' from sources other than his own religion. On meeting with Sant Ishar Singh Ji he asked many question about how one could improve one's life to make it worthy of a true human being's? Sant Ji gave him answer according to the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib and he was totally satisfied. He even told people later on that he had become a disciple of Sant Ishar Singh Ji.

In 1947 the partition of India took place and with it came a blood-bath in which yesterday's neighbours and friends became today's enemies and killers. Inter-religious hatred created by politicians resulted in the slaughter of over one million innocent Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims and millions became homeless. The province of Punjab sustained a major portion of loss of life and property. At such a critical time Sant Ji preached brotherhood of all human beings. He opened his Dera to everyone irrespective of caste or creed so that it became a small

refugee camp. The community kitchen (langar) provided food to thousands of people everyday.

One day a group of young Sikhs who had invaded a Muslim village, killed its several inhabitants and looted valuables and a large amount of grain, brought a cart full of wheat at the Dera and wanted to donate it for the langar. Sant Ji refused to accept the sinful booty and castigated the leaders of the group for the shameful acts they had perpetrated.

Around that time the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), under the headship of Sardar Ishar Singh Majhail, took upon itself to print standardized volumes of Guru Granth Sahib by i) Having all words printed separately (Padd Chhed), because all earlier volumes had continuous writing without separation of individual words. ii) To put invocations before the start of hymns in every Raag in accordance with the original Pothi Sahib compiled by Guru Arjan Dev, now at Kartarpur, although the volume later prepared by Guru Gobind Singh at Damdama Sahib had different placements of invocations in different Raags. An organization of Sants (Sant Samaj) was of the opinion that the volume compiled by Guru Gobind Singh was the final word of the Guru and no changes should therefore be incorporated in it. This group was led by the most popular Sants in the Sikh world and their opinion carried a lot of weight among the Sikh masses.

In 1950 a joint meeting between representatives of Sant Samaj and SGPC was held at Karamsar. Everyone agreed that it was absolutely necessary to have one type of printing (Uniform) of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. A format was agreed upon which SGPC took upon itself to start printing immediately. It was also agreed upon that no further changes would be made in future. Sant Ishar Singh, as the vice president of Sant Samaj, played an important role in getting this decision accepted by all.

At the same time that Sant Ishar Singh Ji started going out of Karamsar (Rara) to conduct large congregational meetings in various towns, he started delivering forceful sermons in which he exhorted devotees to recite *Gurbani*, meditate on *Naam* and forsake consumption of liquor and other intoxicants. On requests from devotees to go to their houses and take food there he agreed only if the devotee promised to give up the drinking of liquor. He believed that liquor was the root cause of most of our social problems. He also held the conviction that every Sikh must take Amrit (Khande di Pauhul) and thus belong to the Guru. At the end of every congregational meeting Amrit was administered by the companions of Sant Ji. He continued this monthly practice (and sometimes bimonthly) for almost forty years until 1970. Hundreds of thousands of devotees took Amrit and became teetotallers and vegetarians because Sant Ji felt that meat eating aroused the base traits in a human being and forbade his devotees to eat it.

He did not subscribe to asceticism, ritualism and other non-sikh practices. Once a group of ascetics came and pitched their tents outside the Karamsar Dera. The head of the group sent a message to the incharge of the langar of the Dera to provide them with raw provisions so they could cook their own food; because they would not eat the food cooked by anyone else. Sant Kishan Singh who was the incharge of the langar replied, "This is Guru's langar and anyone is most welcome to partake the food prepared here. But we do not believe in what you seem to practice. So, you are cordially invited to come and eat whatever is cooked here. For raw provisions you will have to go elsewhere".

In 1952 Sant Ji went to East Africa in the city of Nairobi where a large population of Sikhs had settled on the turn of the century. His melodious Keertan, effective Gurbani discourses and immaculate conduct had astonishing effect on the Sikhs over there. Thousands who had forsaken Sikhi took Amrit and came back into the folds of Sikhi, stopped consuming liquor, and started reciting Gurbani and meditating on Naam. Back at Karamsar several projects including the construction of a high school were going on. But Sant Ji never appealed for funds. Several devotees requested Sant Ji to solicit for donations during his discourses but he refused to do so.

On returning to Karamsar Sant Ji found that the number of daily visitors had increased so much that he could hardly find any time to himself - he wanted solitude for contemplation. Therefore one day he took his personal attendant, Baba Ralla Singh and another couple of close associates, left Karamsar and went to the town of Dablan which is situated close to Patiala-Bathinda road. The land in this area was full of niter and therefore produced very poor crops. Baba Ralla Singh owned some land in this area. He requested Sant Ji to accept his land and

establish a Dera there also. Sant Ji agreed to this request and soon some hutments were constructed there. Although Sant Ji had no intention of making an extensive complex there, as soon as the news spread that Sant Ishar Singh Ji had taken abode there, thousands of devotees started coming and soon transformed the place. Where until a few months back there was hardly any tree, now appeared a luxuriant jungle sprinkled with numerous hutments and a big hall for congregational meetings. This Dera became known as the Sant Aashram Dablan. Devotees untiringly worked to convert the land that was full of niter into fertile and productive tract. A large monthly congregational meeting was held there four days before the full moon night. After the conclusion of this meeting Sant Ji went to Karamsar where the traditional monthly meeting on every full moon night was held. The popularity of this place prompted even the Punjab Government to construct roads to connect the place with some important highways in the state. Soon the annual celebration of Sant Ji's birthday (August 5) at a grand scale started and is continuing at this Dera.

Although Sant Ishar Singh Ji was incharge of both the Deras and no decision could be taken without his consent, he was only interested in spiritual pursuits and never took any interest in the affairs of management. This was foreseen by Sant Attar Singh Ji of Reru who before passing away had asked Sant Kishan Singh to always stay with Sant Ishar Singh and help him run the affairs of the Dera. Sant Kishan Singh never forgot the words of his teacher and took over the responsibility of running the Dera (now two Deras). With time the Deras progressed and the management work increased and became more complicated but Sant Kishan Singh ran the whole affair with great ability and grace. Sant Ishar Singh Ji always agreed with the decisions taken by Sant Kishan Singh. A high school was also established and progressed successfully into a college. Over one hundred rooms, forty of which had modern facilities of attached bath and toilet were also constructed for the comfort of visiting devotees. The money for all these projects came without any solicitation or appeal.

In spite of all the increased activity Sant Ji continued his daily routine of meditation. Several devotees also joined with him in this difficult routine of going to bed at 11:00 PM and getting up at 2:00 AM to sit in the meditation for three hours regardless of weather.

In addition to his devotion to Naam Simran and meditation Sant Ji was an avid reader of books related to religious and spiritual philosophy. If he liked a book he got it printed and distributed among his selected devotees. He also helped monetarily some writers for publication of their books. Some such examples are:

1. Giani Nahar Singh's "Life of Baba Maharaj Singh".
2. Muni Arjan Singh's "Hindi translation of Guru Granth Sahib".
3. Giani Mehar Singh's "Amar Katha".

He also liked to study books on Vedantic Philosophy and encouraged his associates to read them also. But at the same time cautioned that the purpose of reading was to become aware of fundamentals of other schools of thought and consequently to become more steadfast on the path laid out by Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh. He had an unshakeable faith in the teachings of the ten Gurus and strictly believed in the Rehit Maryada of *Khande di Pauhul*.

A Nirmala Sant used to visit Sant Ishar Singh Ji and was always accorded great respect by Sant Ji. After some time Sant Ji went to Hardwar and found that this Nirmala Sant had shaved his beard. Sant Ji refused to even see him saying, "I value devotion to the Gurus and anyone who has forsaken devotion is of no value to me".

The gift of Keertan was bestowed on Sant Ishar Singh Ji by Baba Attar Singh Ji of Reṛu. He never learned to play any musical instrument. He sang with only a single note on the harmonium. But there was a magnetic effect in his melodious voice and an other worldly attraction in the Gurbani discourses that he gave during his Keertan. The words came out of his heart and were the mirror image of his own immaculate conduct. The resulting effect on the listeners was like magic.

A great ascetic, Baba Nand Singh[1], lived near Patiala. He was over ninety years old. All his life, since he left his home while he was very young, he never spent a single night in a covered place (room or hut) but stayed in the open under a tree. He devoted most of his time in meditation. However, he was very fond of listening to Keertan. One of his

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[1] This Baba Nand Singh is different from Baba Nand Singh Ji of Kaleraan or Nanaksar.

devotees mentioned to him the name of Sant Ishar Singh Ji and the wonderful Keertan he performed. Baba Nand Singh immediately expressed a desire to see Sant Ishar Singh and listen to his Keertan. Since he was too weak to travel his desire was conveyed to Sant Ishar Singh Ji who immediately sent a car to bring Baba Nand Singh to the Dera. At the Dera the arrangement for his stay was made under a tree because he refused to stay in a room. On the night of large congregational meeting Sant Ishar Singh Ji recited Keertan for three hours. Baba Nand Singh seemed to have gone into a trance throughout the Keertan. As the Keertan concluded he opened his eyes and said, "This is the third time in my life that I have listened to such celestial Keertan. The first one was from Baba Ram Singh Naamdhaari, the second from Sant Attar Singh Ji of Mastuana and the third one today.

After a couple of days at the conclusion of morning congregational meeting Baba Nand Singh came to Sant Ishar Singh's room. Sant Ji respectfully received him and made him sit next to himself. With great humility Sant Ishar Singh asked Baba Ji the reason for the honour of his unexpected visit. Baba Nand Singh said, "All my life I have spent living under the trees. Now that I have seen your Dera and the peaceful atmosphere here, I would like to spend the rest of my days here provided that you give away this Dera to me". Sant Ishar Singh Ji stayed quiet for a few moments and then called his personal attendant, Baba Ralla Singh and said to him, "With immediate effect I am giving away this Dera to Baba Nand Singh Ji. Please tell all the *sevadars* that if they wish to stay here then they would have to get Baba Ji's permission. If, however, they want to leave then they can take with them only their personal belongings". He then told Baba Nand Singh that at the moment there was only about Rs.11,000.00 (eleven thousands) cash which would be enough to run the place for some time. Baba Nand Singh smiled and said, "May Satguru bless you with greater spiritual progress. I have found that your words and conduct are in unison. That is a sign of greatness. I am not interested in getting entangled in the management of any Dera in the last days of my life. I know that you are already blessed by a great Sant like Baba Attar Singh Ji of Reṛu. Please accept the blessings of this poor Sant also". So saying he departed from the Dera.

In the beginning of twentieth century many Sikh engineers and artisans were encouraged by the British Government, to emigrate to the Eastern part of Africa for clearing the thick forests and laying railway lines. With their hard work these immigrants soon converted the non-productive land into highly productive fields yielding cash crops. The stories of their affluence attracted many imposters who went there posing as sants (spiritual leaders) and extracted money from these simple-minded people. Some learned community leaders soon realized this. They came to Sant Ishar Singh Ji and requested him to visit East Africa in order to spread the true message of the Gurus and thus discourage the onslaught of the imposters. Sant Ji agreed and in January 1951 embarked a ship from the port of Bombay for Mombassa. Many devotees also accompanied him on this voyage and held daily congregational meetings on the ship. They reached Mombassa on 17th January where a large number of devotees came to receive Sant Ji. After staying for a few days at Mombassa, Sant Ji moved to Nairobi where a large number of Sikh families had settled.

In Nairobi although a large number of Sikhs lived, they were divided into factions based on the original tract in Punjab from where they came, like Majha, Doaba, Malwa etc., each having their own Gurdwara. Sant Ji started holding congregational meetings in the Gurdwara of Ramgarhias and preached for unity, mutual love and respect. Soon devotees from all other Gurdwaras started attending his meetings and an atmosphere of unity and mutual respect was created. One of the main and remarkable features of Sant Ishar Singh Ji was that wherever he went he urged everyone to take Amrit (Khande di Pauhul), and Africa was no exception. Here Sant Ji himself administered the Amrit acting as one of the five beloved ones. Thousands of devotees took Amrit from him and started leading the lives of true Gursikhs.

Many leaders of the community requested Sant Ji to appeal to the congregation for funds for the many projects that were in progress at the Deras in Punjab. Sant Ji, however, refused to do so saying that he had come to Africa specifically for the purpose of spreading the word of the Gurus and not for collecting money.

After returning from Africa Sant Ji stayed at the Dera for a few days. Then he decided to visit Calcutta (now Kolkata) because many devotees there had been repeatedly requesting for some time. He travelled by car and stopped over in many places on the way to hold congregational meetings.

In Calcutta he did Keertan in the Gurdwara Jagat Sudhar of Singh Sabha. At that time at this Gurdwara there was no tradition of *Langar* (community kitchen). Sant Ji exhorted after his Keertan that the tradition of *Langar* was started by Guru Nanak and was supposed to be an integral part of every Gurdwara. The effect of this sermon was immediate and from that day *Langar* is regularly served there. Sant Ji stayed in Calcutta for about two months and during this period hundreds of Sikhs who were going astray from the teachings of the Gurus came back in the fold of Sikhism.

On his way back to Punjab Sant Ishar Singh Ji visited Ranchi and Patna Sahib (the birth place of Guru Gobind Singh Ji) where he was accorded great respect and presented with a robe of honour (siropao).

On returning to Dera he suddenly made plans to go to Kashmir. Everyone was surprised at this sudden decision because he had never before talked about a visit to Kashmir. On reaching Srinagar, even before making arrangements for staying there he started for the Dal Lake as if an unknown force was steering him in that direction. On the way to the lake Daljit Singh of New Delhi stopped his car and requested Sant Ji to visit their house-boat. On reaching there Mrs. Daljit Singh started crying. She told that their youngest son who was three years old fell into the lake three days ago and in spite of all the efforts they had not been able to find his body. Sant Ji closed his eyes for some time; then he opened them and said, "The boy has gone according to God's will and is not going to return. However, in a year or so he will come back to you in a new body". These words worked like a soothing balm to the hurt minds of the parents and they went back to New Delhi with fresh hope. The next year a son was born to them who is alive and well.

Once a Nanga (naked) Sant came and stopped outside the village Sadewal Burj. It was the peak summer season but as is the convention of this sect, he started a big fire. Some naughty young boys of the village came and started taunting him. When the Sant did not answer they tore some of his books and some sheets from his bedding. The Sant in frustration threw his torn books and sheets in the fire and cursed the village by saying, "The way you have forced me to burn my belongings, you will also burn due to scarcity of water". The next morning the Sant quietly departed. Soon the villagers realized that their wells were drying up. Lack of water and intense heat resulted in skin diseases with burning sensation in the body. The villagers tried all kinds of incantations and mantras but no improvement occurred. The leaders of the village then went to the Dera of Sant Ishar Singh Ji and described their pitiful condition to Sant Kishan Singh. He told them that the curse could be removed only by the Sant who put it on the village. The villagers tried to find the Sant but all their efforts failed. Finally they came to Sant Ishar Singh Ji and described to him the whole episode. Sant Ji said to them, "Go and start an Akhand Paath in the village, humbly beg for forgiveness from the Guru for hurting a Sant and in future serve with humility and devotion any Sant who visits your village". The villagers followed this advice and soon the water level started rising in the wells and everyone got relief from the skin disease.

In October of 1967 when Sant Ji was visiting a town in U.P., after the morning congregational meeting he came out and sat in the compound so that he could talk to individual devotees for some time. A youngman named Manmohan Singh came and started behaving in a bizarre manner. He vigorously shook his head and spoke Urdu fluently, a language that he had never learned. His accent and mode of talk was typical of a Muslim. Everyone present was convinced that he was possessed by the spirit of a Muslim. Some devotees brought him before Sant Ji who asked him who he was and why had he occupied the body of Manmohan? In reply the spirit said, "My name is Sulaiman and I was a soldier in the army of Sultan Mahmood Ghaznavi. I fought battles in his army and plundered Hindu temples to my fill. After the Sultan returned to Afghanistan I decided to stay in India and started practicing black magic dealing with spirits. On my death I was thrown away from God's court because of my bad deeds. Since then I have been roaming. This youngman urinated near my grave therefore I possessed his body. I humbly request you to do something for my liberation". Sant Ji pointed towards one of his devotees sitting nearby (Giani Gurdev Singh Ranewal) and said, "Go and take birth in his house. Stay a devoted Sikh all your life and you will be emancipated". He immediately left the body of Manmohan Singh who became normal. About a year after this episode a baby boy was born in Giani Gurdev Singh's house and was named Gurmeet Singh by Sant Ji's blessings.

In the early part of second half of the twentieth century a large number of Sikhs from Punjab immigrated to England. Almost at the same time the political upheavals in some parts of Africa also forced a large number of Sikhs to migrate to England. These people with their honest and hard work soon became monetarily comfortable. As the news of their wealth reached Punjab many *Raagis* (religious hymn singers), *Parcharaks* (preachers) and imposter Sants rushed to England to relieve these simple and innocent people of their hard-earned money. Soon the people in England realized that most of these *Raagis, Parcharaks* and *Sants* were out to get their money. This resulted in a repulsive feeling towards these greedy visitors. However, the immigrants from Africa still remembered the visit of Sant Ishar Singh Ji who in spite of their repeated requests had refused to appeal for funds to run a school in India. Therefore they wanted Sant Ji to visit England and disseminate the message of the Gurus.

In 1970 Charanjit Singh (owner of Coca Cola, India), who knew of various requests from the congregations of England, also requested Sant Ji to visit there and carry out missionary work because many Sikhs there were going astray from Sikhism. Finally in 1974 Sant Ji agreed to visit England and a formal announcement to that effect was made in the congregational gathering of 14th June (*Sangrand of Asarh*). On 23rd of June Sant Ishar Singh Ji started for England by air along with a group of his devotees that included a Raagi Jatha also. At London airport (Heathrow) many prominent Sikhs from Gurdwara South Hall and some important visitors which included Sant Sewa Singh, were present to give a warm welcome to Sant Ji. He was then taken in a motorcade to the place where he was to stay.

From the very next day the congregational meetings started. For some unknown reason the number of ladies in earlier meetings was usually greater than that of men. Sant Ji also often discussed the subject of the place of female gender in the Sikh society. He quoted Guru Nanak's hymn wherein he has exhorted the equality of genders by saying:

ਸੋ ਕਿਉ ਮੰਦਾ ਆਖੀਐ ਜਿਤੁ ਜੰਮਹਿ ਰਾਜਾਨ ॥ (SGGS, p.473)

How can the one who has given birth to great person be called *inferior?*

No other religion in the world can claim this aspect of human rights.

A very devoted Sikh, Ishar Singh, daily came to the meeting and after that listened to the discourses of Sant Ji when he sat in a chair outside the meeting place. He had a friend who claimed to be an atheist. He always argued with Ishar Singh that he was wasting his time in a pursuit that was futile and was not going to benefit him in any way. Ishar Singh always tried to defend himself and also instigated his friend to come to the congregation at least once and then decide for himself about its benefits. Finally he succeeded in bringing his atheist friend to the congregation. The friend was so much affected by the atmosphere and the Gurbani discourse by Sant Ji that he started coming regularly. After some time when one day Sant Ji announced that Amrit (Khande di Pauhul) would be administered in a few days, he was among the first to volunteer.

Birmingham is a large industrial town in England. A large number of Sikh families had settled there because of availability of good jobs. However, the Sikhs here were divided into various clans and each clan had established its own Gurdwara. For example, Ram Gahria, Ravidasias, Tonk Khatris etc., had their own separate Gurdwaras. Sant Ji preached for unity and in his meetings members of all Gurdwaras participated.

When Sant Ishar Singh Ji decided to leave England the management committee of the Gurdwara South Hall, where Sant Ji had held most of his congregational meetings, decided to confer a robe of honour on him. On the last day they presented the robe of honour and a substantial sum of money to Sant Ji. He accepted the robe of honour (Siropao) but declined to accept the money saying that it belonged to the Guru's house and must stay there. On 31st of October, 1974, Sant Ji along with his entourage returned to India.

Back in India Sant Ishar Singh Ji changed his daily routine so that he gave more time to individual devotees - giving advice, removing their doubts and solving their problems. He also spent more time out of the Dera, going to different towns (Delhi, Hapur, Ludhiana, Barnala, etc.) to spread the Gurus' word. Everywhere he preached his sermon had a deep colour of detachment. He stressed on this subject and said, "Now is the time to do what is a must for a human being. Who knows whether one would ever get such a chance again". On the last day at Barnala, four hundred devotees took Amrit (*Khande di Pauhul*). He then returned to Karamsar to celebrate the festival of Baisakhi, stopping over in several towns on the way. This turned out to be his last Baisakhi.

In the evening congregational meeting on the Baisakhi day thousands of devotees had gathered from all over the country. Sant Ji gave a sermon on the significance of Baisakhi for the Khalsa. He described the story how the five Sikhs without any hesitation gave their heads for Guru's love and became the five beloved ones. It was the devotion to the Guru without any doubt or hesitation that led them to acceptance by the Guru and God. Towards the end of his sermon he indicated in a subtle way that he might not be there on the next Baisakhi. Many devotees thought that Sant Ji intended to visit abroad for a long time. They went to Sant Kishan Singh and requested him to prevail upon Sant Ji not to take another extended trip abroad. When Sant Kishan Singh conveyed this wish of the devotees to Sant Ishar Singh Ji, he said, "You are a Gurmukh and understand the edict of Guru Nanak that one must stay contented and happy in God's will. Taking or not taking a trip abroad is not under anyone's control. You should therefore not worry and ask me to go against His will". Sant Kishan Singh said, "I have done my duty of passing the request of many devotees on to you. My own perception is that this body of mine will probably not see you again if you go on another foreign trip. But that seems to be the will of God". So saying Sant Kishan Singh went to his quarters.

With the beginning of 1975 Sant Ji started making plans to visit England again. On April 15 he left Karamsar with a group of companions and reached Delhi. He stayed in Delhi for over three weeks and gave as much time as possible to the devotees who came to find solace in his sweet and sympathetic words. All who visited him had a strange and uncanny feeling that this was their last meeting with Sant Ji.

Sant Ishar Singh Ji flew from the Palam (New Delhi) airport in the second week of May for England. On reaching London Sant Ji stayed at the South Hall Gurdwara for only one day and held the congregational meeting in which the number of attenders was much larger than any meeting during his previous trip. In this meeting Sant Ji spoke on the subject of detachment from Maya. He often quoted from Guru Nanak's composition in Tukhaari Raag (*Baarah Maha*) in which the Guru has beautifully portrayed the longings of a bride (human soul) to attain bliss with her bridegroom (God). His appeal to the listeners to take Amrit was so effective that several hundred volunteers took Amrit on this last congregational meeting at South Hall Gurdwara. From South Hall Sant Ji went on an extensive missionary tour of England that included the cities of Bedford, Louton, Greatyard Town, Rochester Woolverhampton etc., and spread the message of the Gurus among thousands of Sikhs as well as non-Sikhs.

While Sant Ji was at London, one day he was visiting the home of Ishar Singh Ayali, one of his close devotees. At that time the parents (Ayalis) were informed that their daughter had met with an accident and was taken to the hospital. The father rushed to the hospital where he was told that her injuries were quite serious. Any prognosis would be possible only 24 hours after the performance of surgery. On returning home he described the situation to Sant Ji, who said, "Have faith in Akaal Purakh. Everything is going to be alright". He added that when the child returns to consciousness she should be given only juices of vegetables and fruits. The next day the girl opened her eyes and the doctors declared her to be out of danger. Contrary to the food (non-vegetarian) prescribed by the doctors, the parents followed the advice of Sant Ji. To the amazement of everyone including the doctors the girl fully recovered within a few days.

After this episode Mr. Ayali accompanied Sant Ji (wherever he went) during the rest of his stay in England and made notes of some of the queries made by Sant Ji from time to time:

1. If someone suddenly passes away in England, are there any problems in sending his body back to India? What arrangements are necessary to do so?
2. Is the autopsy mandatory here even in the event of natural death?
3. How much does it cost to have a box to carry the body abroad?

All these questions pointed to some event that Sant Ji could foresee but no one else had any idea about.

Sant Ji, during this time also made several observations which again told of some event (probably his own leaving for Akaal Purakh's abode) that was to occur in the near future:

1. It would be proper to dispose off the body in the ocean that surrounded England. But then the devotees in India would be deprived of the last sight.
2. It would be proper to dispose the body in the river near Bhagaur Sahib where Guru Gobind Singh Ji composed the Chaupaee; because the water there is quite deep compared to that at Hari ka Pattan.
3. Dr. Pritam Singh would make arrangements for release of the body and its shipping to India.
4. If need be, Charanjit Singh could be called from New Delhi by telegram. He would take care of everything.
5. There is no need to worry about the Dera. Sant Kishan Singh Ji is capable of taking good care there.

One day a telegram arrived from India informing that Sant Bhagwan Singh had passed away. On reading this telegram Sant Ji closed his eyes and stayed quiet for some time. Then he opened his eyes and said, "It was supposed to be my turn to go first. Why were you (Sant Bhagwan Singh) in such a hurry? Now wait for me - I am also coming soon to join you". All the devotees present there started crying on hearing these words of Sant Ji who said, "No one can change the writ of Akaal Purakh. A Gursikh must stay happy and contented in His will".

Now the sudden change became quite evident in Sant Ji's demeanour. He kept quiet most of the time and whenever he spoke the subject was detachment from worldly affairs. Some devotees and companions felt this change and requested Sant Ji to return to India. He said, "We have to abide by the will of Akaal Purakh and go whenever and wherever He wants us to go". Then he added, "I want my body to be disposed off in the River Satluj after visiting Karamsar".

Usually Sant Ji used to get up in the morning, take a bath, meditate for a short time and then read or listen to (read by some devotee) some book on philosophy. Then at seven he took his breakfast. But one morning after taking bath he sat in meditation and did not take a book to read nor called someone to read to him. At seven a devotee came to see if Sant Ji was ready to take breakfast but returned when he saw him in deep meditation. He returned at nine but saw Sant Ji sitting in the same position. Then he came closer and touched the body and found that Sant Ji had departed on the journey to the eternal land. Dr. Karam Singh was immediately summoned who confirmed that Sant Ji had passed away due to heart-failure.

Charanjit Singh of Coca Cola was informed in New Delhi by telegram. He flew the same day to England from New Delhi and made arrangement to take the body back to India. On August 30, the body reached Palam Airport (now Indira Gandhi airport) where hundreds of devotees were waiting for the last sight of Sant Ji. From the airport the body was taken to Gurdwara Sis Ganj and then to Karamsar. The next morning (Aug. 31) the body was taken in the form of a procession which included hundreds of cars, buses and trucks to Kiratpur and then to Bhambhaur Sahib where it was immersed in the river according to Sant Ji's wishes. On September 7 the last rites were performed at the Dera with the conclusion of Akhand Paath of Guru Granth Sahib in the presence of representatives of the Punjab Government, Jathedar of Akaal Takhat and Sants of many Deras from all over India, many of whom paid glowing tributes to Sant Ishar Singh Ji.

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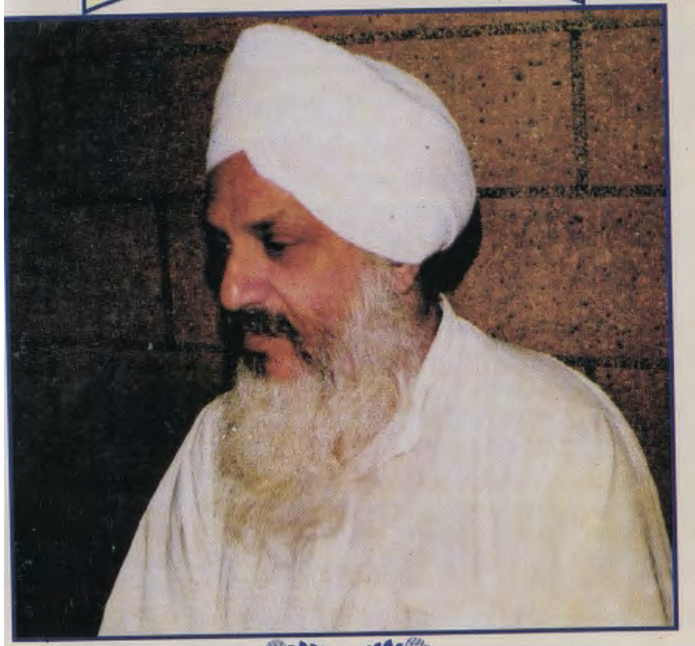
Sant Kirpal Singh Ji of Bhai Mani Singh Taksaal



SANT KIRPAL SINGH JI OF BHAI MANI SINGH TAKSAAL

(Nov. 7, 1915-May 23, 1984)

On November 7, 1915, in Amritsar, a beautiful baby boy was born to Bibi Phool Kaur and Bhai Partap Singh. Even on birth, the baby had a celestial glow on its face. Whoever took a look at this new born, felt peace and tranquillity within and had an urge to pick it up and give a hug. The baby never cried and was smiling all the time. All friends, relatives and neighbours started saying that Phool Kaur's son was the incarnation of God (Ishwar) Himself. Everyone started calling the baby, "Ishar", an abbreviation of "Ishwar". The parents also thought this name to be appropriate and gave the baby the same name.

Both, Bhai Partap Singh and Bibi Phool Kaur were devoted Sikhs. Their daily routine was to get up early in the morning and go to Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple) where they took bath in the Sarovar (Amritsar lake). After that they listened to the Keertan being sung in the Harimandir (sanctum sanctorium) and to hear the commandment (*Vaak*) from Guru Granth Sahib on the conclusion of the Keertan. From Darbar Sahib they went to the Dera (seminary) of Sant Amir Singh in Satto Wali Gali, which happened to be in their neighbourhood, and listened to the Gurbani discourse by Sant Amir Singh Ji[1]. Only after the conclusion of Sant Ji's discourse they went home and started their day. They had continued this routine for many years without a break and thus had listened to the meanings of the whole Guru Granth Sahib several times.

Bhai Partap Singh owned a flour mill and from its income he and his family had a comfortable living. He and his wife often came to the *Dera* (Seminary) to do some seva (to clean the place or to cook food for the students of the seminary) and whenever possible, donated some money also towards the expenses for running the place. They had thus

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[1] Sant Amir Singh was a renowned scholar of Sikhism who taught many students the exegesis of Guru Granth Sahib. Every year he completed the meanings of Guru Granth Sahib from beginning to the end. Many of his students turned out to be renowned *Parcharaks* (preachers).

developed closeness with Sant Amir Singh and his teacher, Baba Uttam Singh who was the incharge of the Dera.

A few weeks after the birth of the baby when Bibi Phool Kaur was able to work in the kitchen Bhai Partap Singh, following the Sikh tradition, requested five devoted Gursikhs to pay visit to their house, partake their humble offering of lunch and bless the newborn baby. The five Gursikhs whom Bhai Partap Singh had requested to bless the baby, included Baba Uttam Singh and Sant Amir Singh also. He particularly wanted these two holy men, who usually did not accept such invitations, to come and bless the baby. However, to the surprise of Bhai Partap Singh, the two accepted the invitation gladly. He was overjoyed to know this and eagerly started waiting for the auspicious day when he would serve these holy men.

On the specified day and time Baba Uttam Singh and Sant Amir Singh arrived Bhai Partap Singh's house. The family of Bhai Partap Singh and Bibi Phool Kaur[2] gave a warm welcome to the five holy guests. According to the tradition, Bhai Partap Singh, the man of the house, washed the hands and feet of all the guests and then made them sit on a neat carpet. Mata Phool Kaur then served the *Langar* (food) that she had prepared with love, while reciting Gurbani. On the conclusion of lunch, as is customary, Baba Uttam Singh said Ardas (supplication) to God and Guru and prayed that the baby be showered with the Grace of Akaal Purakh. He then closed his eyes and kept quiet for some time as if he was looking into the future of the baby. When he opened his eyes, he said, "This boy will grow up to be a great person. He will be remembered for the great things that he is going to accomplish during his lifetime". On hearing such wonderful words about the future of their son from a holy person like Baba Uttam Singh, Bhai Partap Singh and Mata Phool Kaur were overjoyed. They had great faith that whatever Baba Ji said would turn out to be true. Baba Uttam Singh then took the baby in his lap, put his hand on its forehead and said to the parents, "You are fortunate to have such a blessed soul in your home. This baby is the proof that your devotion and selfless service has been accepted and Guru Ram Das Ji has specially showered his grace on your family".

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[2] Bhai Partap Singh and Mata Phool Kaur had one daughter, Jaswant Kaur and a son, Jit Singh, older than the new born, Ishar Singh. Later on they had another daughter, Maninder Kaur and two sons, Gurbachan Singh and Surjit Singh.

The news of blessings of Baba Uttam Singh quickly spread in the neighbourhood and many neighbours (men as well as women) came to see the baby and pay homage to this blessed soul. Soon afterwards, on an advice from Baba Uttam Singh and Sant Amir Singh, Bhai Partap Singh and Bibi Phool Kaur took Khande di Pauhul. At that time, according to Sikh tradition the name of Phool Kaur was changed to Satnam Kaur.

Young Ishar started going to Darbar Sahib every morning with his parents. Unlike most children of his age he listened to the Keertan and the daily *Vaak* (commandment) with rapt attention as if he was trying to absorb its meanings. He had an amazingly sharp intellect so that soon he remembered many passages from Guru Granth Sahib by heart. Similarly, he listened to the Gurbani discourses by Sant Amir Singh with equal attention when he went to the Dera with his parents, according to their daily routine. This trait of the child immensely pleased Baba Uttam Singh.

When he became five years of age Ishar was admitted in Kalghidhar School (Aatta Mandi). He was a very bright student and eager learner. In addition to Gurmukhi script which he had already learned at home he learned Urdu in the school. Every day after school, he came home, took lunch and in the afternoon went to the Dera where Sant Amir Singh used to teach exegesis of Guru Granth Sahib to his disciples, most of whom were grown ups in age. Some of them were ascetics who belonged to other *Deras* from different parts of the country. Ishar sat among them and to the amazement of everyone took active part in some discussions.

It is generally seen that in the life of those who are blessed ones, certain events happen that can be called miracles. People attribute such events, which are spontaneous acts of nature beyond the comprehension of ordinary human beings, to the person involved. In young Ishar's life also some such events occurred which cannot be explained on the basis of scientific logic.

One day when Ishar returned home after his school; as he was about to enter the front door of his house to pass through the porch, a strange voice warned him to stop and step back. Ishar immediately stopped and took a couple of steps backward so that now he was outside the entry door. Suddenly the roof of the porch collapsed and fell down. If Ishar had taken a step forward he would definitely have been buried under the fallen debris.

The mother had seen Ishar entering the front door. She thought that he had been buried under the debris. She started crying and calling Ishar loudly. Ishar answered her call and said, "Dear mother, do not worry, I am safe. When I was about to enter the house I heard you call me and say that I should step back. I obeyed your order and that has saved my life". The mother was astonished to hear what Ishar had just said; because she had not called to warn him of the impending danger, of which she had absolutely no knowledge.

As already mentioned, Bhai Partap Singh (Ishar's father) owned a flour mill. Sometimes Ishar went to the mill and stayed there for some time before going home from the school. One day on returning from school he stopped at the mill. He saw that the mill was not running. On seeing Ishar, his father said, "It is good that you have come here today. The mill has been out of order since morning and I was waiting for you to come so that I could go and get a mechanic to solve the problem". So saying, Bhai Partap Singh left the mill to get the mechanic. After some time Ishar got up from the manager's seat and went to the mill. As he put his hand on the mill it suddenly started running. When the father returned with the mechanic he was surprised to see the mill running. When he asked Ishar how had that happened, he replied that all he had done was to touch the mill and it started running. The mechanic, a Muslim young man, kissed Ishar's hand and said, "This young lad is unusual. He seems to have some celestial power in his hands; he is blessed one". When Bhai Partap Singh came home and told the story to his wife, she said, "I am now fully convinced that our son has been sent by Akaal Purakh for some special purpose".

One day while Sant Amir Singh was massaging his teacher, Baba Uttam Singh, the topic of continuation of the tradition of the Dera came up. Sant Amir Singh said, "For the past thirty years I have kept up the tradition of the Dera, the insemination of the knowledge of Gurbani by explaining the traditional meanings of Guru Granth Sahib. Hundreds of students have come and gone and some of them are quite successful preachers. However, I have not come across a single student so far who could take my place when I am gone. Now that I am getting old, this thought has started bothering me". Baba Uttam Singh kept quiet for some time, as if he was in deep thought. Then he said, "We need not worry. This is Guru's own task and I am sure he will help us find a solution to the problem. You are still not so old as to start worrying about an heir". Sant Amir Singh said, "To train someone to a level where he could effectively teach others is going to take a lot of time. That is what worries me so much". Baba Uttam Singh said, "Alright, I have someone in my mind, who could reach or even exceed the level of excellence that you have been thinking of". On further questioning by Sant Amir Singh, Baba Ji said, "I have been observing young Ishar, the son of Bhai Partap Singh, for some time. He is a very brilliant young boy and has a genuine interest in learning Gurbani and its meanings. Even in such a young age he has been asking many thought-provoking questions. This indicates the depth to which he wants to go to understand the meaning of a Shabad".

Sant Amir Singh momentarily seemed happy to hear this but became serious immediately and said, "But do you think that his parents would be willing to part with such a brilliant son"? Baba Uttam Singh said, "Let us have faith in Guru. He himself will solve our problem. We should ask Bhai Partap Singh to give away his son to the *Dera* to carry out the noble task of the Guru for the rest of his life".

After some time one day Bhai Partap Singh came to the Dera in the afternoon when Sant Amir Singh was massaging Baba Uttam Singh. On seeing Bhai Partap Singh Baba Ji got up and received him with a warm welcome. On asking him the reason for his visit at such a time of the day Bhai Partap Singh said, "Baba Ji, for some time my wife and I have been thinking of holding an Akhand Paath (non-stop reading of Guru Granth Sahib) at our home. Now with Guru's grace we have set the date. I have therefore come here to get your blessings and to request both of you to kindly grace the occasion on the day the concluding of the Paath will take place". Both holy men thought that God Himself had created an opportunity for them to express their heart's desire, of obtaining Ishar for the *Dera*, to Bhai Partap Singh. Baba Uttam Singh said, "Your house is always blessed by the Guru because of your immaculate conduct and strict adherence to the Sikh tenets. We will be glad to come to your house to pay our obeisance to Sri Guru Granth Sahib and the congregation".

On the day of conclusion of the Akhand Paath Baba Uttam Singh and Sant Amir Singh reached Bhai Partap Singh's house and after obeisance to Guru Granth Sahib sat down in the congregation. After the conclusion of the paath the raagis (the devotional singers) started the Keertan. At that point Bhai Partap Singh came and requested Sant Amir Singh to come and sit by the side of Guru Granth Sahib and do the Katha (explanation) of the *Vaak* (the commandment of Guru Granth Sahib) at the conclusion of the ceremony; because that was the desire of his family and all present in the congregation (Sangat). Sant Amir Singh said, "I am a humble servant of the Guru and it is my privilege to be able to share with the Sangat (congregation) whatever Akaal Purakh has bestowed upon me as the Knowledge of Gurbani". He then took Baba Uttam Singh's hand and the two came to sit next to Guru Granth Sahib.

After the Ardas (supplication) the Granthi read the commandment from Guru Granth Sahib and Sant Amir Singh gave an elaborate discourse on the history of that hymn (Shabad) along with the explanation in such a beautiful way that the whole congregation was enthralled to hear such a scholarly discourse. After the conclusion of the ceremony the Langar (common refractory) was served to all. The two holy men also partook the Langar sitting with the rest of the Sangat.

After everyone except some close relatives of the family had left, Bhai Partap Singh requested the two Sants to stay with them for some more time because some of his relatives would like to ask some questions on Gurbani. So all of them went inside the house and sat in the living room. Several people asked questions to which Sant Amir Singh gave appropriate answers to their complete satisfaction.

After the question-answer session was over, Sant Amir Singh said to Bhai Partap Singh, "We have also come here today with a question for you. Hope you will reply to our satisfaction". Both, Bhai Partap Singh as well as Bibi Satnam Kaur stood up and with folded hands said, "It will be our great fortune if we could be capable of fulfilling any of your desires. We consider you second only to our Gurus; therefore, your wish is our command and we will obey it if it is within our reach and control. Please feel free to express whatever is in your mind". Sant Amir Singh then said, "We need a young boy whom we could train to ultimately take charge of my duties of teaching Gurbani exegesis and all other responsibilities of the *Dera*".

Bibi Satnam Kaur immediately replied, "Revered sir, we have three sons. Please pick any one of them who you think will be able to fill your shoes. It is our good fortune that one of our sons will be able to follow the path treaded by Gurmukhs like you". Baba Uttam Singh looked around but did not see young Ishar among the members of the family gathered there. He said, "I do not see the one I really wanted to take along with me today". Bhai Partap Singh and Bibi Satnam Kaur had great expectations on young Ishar. He was a brilliant boy who did extremely well in his studies. They wanted him to get higher education and become a doctor or a lawyer. To hear from Baba Uttam Singh that he wanted Ishar to leave his education and join the Dera made them somewhat disheartened. But they replied, "Ishar has gone to school. When he comes back we will bring him to the Dera". Sant Amir Singh then said, "Before bringing him to the Dera, first ask him if he really wants to give up his studies and dedicate his life to the cause of Satguru. Only if he is willing to do so without any persuasion, then bring him to us". Then Baba Uttam Singh and Sant Amir Singh left for the Dera.

After the two holy men had left the whole family was quiet for some time as if everyone had received a shock from their proposition. Bhai Partap Singh and Bibi Satnam Kaur found themselves in a really difficult situation. Finally Satnam Kaur said, "It is the greatness of the Sants that in spite of our word given to them they have left the final decision on Ishar. So we must wait till he returns from the school".

When Ishar returned from school he saw that everyone was quiet and looking at him glumly. When Bibi Satnam Kaur started serving lunch he asked his mother, "What is such a serious problem as a result of which everyone is looking so gloomy"? Before the mother could speak his elder brother told him that Baba Uttam Singh and Sant Amir Singh had come to attend the function and afterwards when they came inside the house, had asked father and mother to give you away to them so that after proper training you could take care of the Dera and continue the tradition of teaching the exegesis of Guru Granth Sahib as Sant Amir Singh has been doing for the past many years. On hearing this Ishar took a deep breath and said, "Dear Brother, I do not know if I am so fortunate as to get spiritual and educational training from as accomplished a teacher as Sant Amir Singh. But I would give anything in my life to get such an opportunity". Bhai Partap Singh then asked his son if he was ready to devote the rest of his life to the cause of the Guru. To this Ishar answered, "I will consider myself extremely fortunate if Baba Ji and Sant Ji would accept me as their disciple".

Both Bhai Partap Singh and Bibi Satnam Kaur were glad to hear these words from their son. A load had been lifted from their minds. However, the heart of the mother was not yet ready to accept the impending separation from the son. She therefore warned Ishar that the life which he was ready to embark upon was not going to be easy. It was going to be full of hardships for which a will power of steel was needed. Ishar replied, "Dear mother, I am ready to sacrifice everything to learn to read and understand Gurbani, to be able to meditate and to sing Keertan. The mother was now satisfied; so the parents decided to take Ishar to the Dera and offer their son to the service of Guru and Akaal Purakh. They informed Sant Amir Singh of Ishar's desire and their own decision and requested him to set the time to perform the dedication ceremony of their son the next morning. Sant Ji agreed to do so.

The next morning the whole family got ready to go to the Dera for the ceremony. Bhai Partap Singh, according to tradition, took five sheets, five pieces of bed tapestry and five kitchen utensils to offer along with his son. The family on reaching the Dera went to the hall where Guru Granth Sahib was installed and where Baba Uttam Singh and Sant Amir Singh were waiting for them. After obeisance to Sri Guru Granth Sahib and placing their offerings Bhai Partap Singh requested Baba Uttam Singh to say a supplication (Ardas) and read the commandment (*Vaak*) from Guru Granth Sahib.

Baba Uttam Singh in his supplication to Guru and Akaal Purakh said, "O Almighty Satguru, today Bhai Partap Singh and Bibi Satnam Kaur are here to offer their son, Ishar Singh, for your service. Pray be graceful and give the young boy capacity and ability to carry out your missionary work successfully". After the ceremony, both Baba Uttam Singh and Sant Amir Singh blessed young Ishar. Karah Parshad (blessed pudding) was then distributed following which those present in the congregation congratulated the parents for their dedication to the Guru's cause and to Ishar for embarking on the spiritual path.

On returning home, Bibi Satnam Kaur who had intense love for Ishar, started experiencing the pangs of separation. She asked her husband to request Baba Uttam Singh to allow Ishar to spend nights at home for some time. He could go to the Dera in the morning and stay there all day to carry out the duties assigned to him. Bhai Partap Singh, who was also missing his favourite son, agreed with his wife and both decided to go to the Dera and request Baba Ji accordingly. The next morning at the end of the congregational meeting at the Dera they made their request to Baba Uttam Singh. Baba Ji immediately called Ishar and said to him, "Your parents miss you so much that they would like you to spend the nights at home and come back to the Dera in the morning. Would you like to follow this routine"? Eleven years old Ishar unhesitently replied, "Sir, since yesterday you have become my mother as well as father and this Dera my home. Please do not send me to that house now. I will not be happy if you order me to go there. I now belong to the Dera for the rest of my life". Sant Amir Singh, who was sitting there, was very happy to see the determination of young Ishar. He looked meaningfully at the parents who understood the gesture and returned home.

Young Ishar now whole-heartedly immersed himself in the service of the *Dera*. He got up early in the morning took a bath and recited the morning prayers which he had learned by heart. He then took the soiled white sheets covering the carpets of the congregational hall, broomed the hall and spread fresh white sheets with the help of another resident disciple. Then he washed the soiled sheets and spread for drying. During the day he attended the class to learn Punjabi language and listened to the explanation of Gurbani taught by Sant Amir Singh.

After some time Sant Amir Singh made arrangements to have "Khande di Pauhul" administered to a group of his disciples. Ishar was also included in this group. After taking the Pauhul his name was changed to Kirpal Singh. The news of Ishar's taking 'Khande di Pauhul' and the change of his name, was duly transmitted to Bhai Partap Singh and Bibi Satnam Kaur so that they should start calling him by his new name.

In a short time Bhai Kirpal Singh became proficient in reading and writing Gurmukhi. He was then inducted to scriptural works like *Panj Granthi*, Twenty two Vaars and *Bhagat Bani* (utterances of Bhaktas from Guru Granth Sahib). Those days the volumes of Guru Granth Sahib were printed such that the words were not separated (pad chhed). Therefore, only those who had sufficient knowledge of language and meanings of Gurbani could correctly read it (do the Paath). It was therefore essential to have a prior study of works like *Panj Granthi* and *Bhagat Bani* which were printed with words separated from each other.

After Bhai Kirpal Singh had finished the study of these individual scriptural works he was inducted to Guru Granth Sahib. To the amazement of everyone, within a short period he started reciting Guru Granth Sahib correctly in his extremely melodious voice. All those who heard this twelve years old kid recite Guru Granth Sahib with such accuracy and with such sweet tone were forever affected deeply and became his admirers.

In addition to reading from Guru Granth Sahib, Bhai Kirpal Singh regularly attended the classes of exegesis given by Sant Amir Singh. It was interesting to see a twelve years old sitting with rapt attention, in a class where many learned *sadhus* three to four times his age, belonging to various sects, were listening to the philosophical discourses on some esoteric subjects of Gurbani. Sometimes students belonging to Vedantic and other Hindu schools of thought tried to ask questions that could lead to dialectical arguments. To such questions Sant Amir Singh's answer was, "We Sikhs are fortunate to possess the great treasure of *Bhakti* and *Naam Simran* in the form of Guru Granth Sahib. There is no place for dialectics in our religion". Young Kirpal Singh eagerly absorbed every word of his teacher like a sponge.

By the time Bhai Kirpal Singh was fifteen years old he had already completed three full classes of exegesis of Guru Granth Sahib and had developed enough confidence to explain the meanings of some of the most difficult *Shabads* (Hymns) to new disciples who came to learn from Sant Amir Singh.

In addition to attending the classes Bhai Kirpal Singh had also taken on several other duties of the *Dera* which he carried out to everyone's satisfaction. He got up at 3:00 in the morning and accompanied Baba

Uttam Singh and Sant Amir Singh to Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple) where he helped now 80 years old Baba Uttam Singh take a bath in the Amritsar lake (Sarovar). He then took the two sants to the Harimandir (Sanctum Sanctorium) where they listened to the Keertan. At the conclusion of the morning Keertan of Aasa-ki-Vaar, they listened to the *Vaak* (commandment of the day) which he noted down. Back at the Dera Sant Amir Singh gave the explanation of this *Vaak* to the congregation which included all his disciples and some devotees who came to listen to him every morning. He also took over the *Seva* of massaging Baba Uttam Singh every evening from Sant Amir Singh. Although this routine was very strenuous, Bhai Kirpal Singh carried it out with missionary zeal and efficiently like clock work.

In addition to learning the exegesis of Guru Granth Sahib Bhai Kirpal Singh also learned the meanings of books like Vaars and Kabit Sawaiyyas of Bhai Gurdas, Gur Pratap Suraj Granth of Bhai Santokh Singh and many other such books understanding of which were considered a prerequisite to understand the Gurbani. His avidity for knowledge was so intense that he along with some other students requested Sant Amir Singh to start a class to teach the exegesis of the Dasam Granth. Sant Ji readily acceded to this request and a special class was started for this purpose.

The students soon realized how difficult Dasam Granth was. Not only was its language very difficult but the metaphors and allegories were so intertwined that it amazed them at the genius of Guru Gobind Singh who in a relatively short span of his life, a major portion of which he spent fighting battles and starting the Khalsa brotherhood, could compose such exquisite poetry also. They were also immensely impressed with the vastness of knowledge of Sant Amir Singh who could explain such difficult poetry so lucidly. Another aspect of Dasam Granth that Bhai Kirpal Singh soon noted was the use of a large number of Hindu mythological stories. It was therefore necessary to have a grasp on these mythological anecdotes. With this idea in mind he started studying Hindu Puranas and other books of Hindu mythology in whatever spare time he could squeeze out of his busy schedule.

By the time Bhai Kirpal Singh was 39 years of age he had completed 27 explanations of complete Guru Granth Sahib and a few of Dasam Granth taught by Sant Amir Singh. He had also acquired a vast knowledge of Hindu Puranas and other mythological works and had developed a complete grasp over the works of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Santokh Singh.

Around that time Sant Amir Singh developed prostate problem. The doctors suggested surgery but Sant Ji did not agree to undergo any surgical procedure. When Bhai Kirpal Singh came to know of this he immediately went to Baba Uttam Singh and requested him to prevail upon Sant Ji to follow the advice of the doctors. Baba Uttam Singh understood the gravity of the situation and told Sant Amir Singh that his life was too valuable to the Panth to lose due to negligence of not undergoing an operation. That he was carrying out a very important task of inculcating the knowledge of Gurbani which no one else could do. It was therefore extremely important to keep him alive and fit as long as possible. Sant Amir Singh, who had a great regard for his teacher, could not say no and readily agreed to undergo the operation. He was therefore admitted in the hospital as directed by the doctors. On the morning when the performance of surgery was scheduled Bhai Kirpal Singh was sitting by the side of the bed of Sant Amir Singh. He saw a man enter the room and started removing the sheet that covered Sant Ji. Bhai Kirpal Singh asked him what was he planning of doing? The man said, "I am a barber and have come here to shave the portion of Sant Ji's body where the incision was to be made. According to the doctor it was necessary to prevent any chances of infection. Bhai Kirpal Singh angrily asked to barber to leave the room because shaving any part of a Sikh's body was worse than cutting his throat. In the mean time the surgeon came in and tried to persuade Sant Amir Singh to give his permission to shave a few inches. But Sant Ji said, "I would rather die than agree to this proposal of yours. If you cannot operate without shaving then I must leave just now". The doctor reluctantly performed the operation and to his amazement it went quite successfully.

One day while he was still recovering from his surgery in the hospital, Sant Amir Singh called Bhai Kirpal Singh and said, "You have been learning at the Dera for twenty seven years and have studied many Hindu scriptural works also. I am convinced that now you are capable of independently explaining the meanings of Gurbani the way I have done for the past fifty years. I still remember when you were born and Baba Uttam Singh and I went to your house to see you. Even at that time both of us felt that a great soul had taken birth. Your selfless service for the past twenty seven years and your knowledge of Hindu and Sikh scriptures convinces me that we were not wrong. I am going to stay in the hospital for some more time; but I want that the work of the Dera should go on. I also feel that I am too old to carry this load of responsibility any more. I believe that a younger and more enthusiastic person like you can do it more satisfactorily. From now on I want you to assume the responsibility of inseminating the traditional Gurbani exegesis in my place. God and Satguru will be your helper in this noble task".

Bhai Kirpal Singh stood up with folded hands before his teacher and said, "Sir, as much as I wanted to serve you while you are recovering here, I cannot disregard your command also. Kindly pray for me that I can come up to your expectations. As you have wished I will start teaching the class from tomorrow". So saying he bowed before Sant Ji and returned to the Dera and made the announcement that according to the wishes of Sant Amir Singh Ji, he would start taking the class from the next day.

The next morning he got up at 3:00 AM and woke up all the disciples. Then he went to Baba Uttam Singh's room and woke him up too. Baba Ji was one hundred four years old at that time and could not walk any distance. Therefore Bhai Kirpal Singh called a rikshaw, Baba Ji sat in it and went to Darbar Sahib along with some other disciples. There he helped Baba Ji take a bath in the Sarovar and then walk to the Harimandir. Keertan had already started there, so everyone sat in the sanctum sanctorum to listen to the Keertan. After some time the procession of Guru Granth Sahib arrived when everyone stood up and joined the morning supplication (Ardaas).

Bhai Kirpal Singh was eagerly awaiting the first commandment of the day from Guru Granth Sahib. All night he had been praying to Satguru to help him in successfully discharging his new duty. Therefore this commandment meant a lot to him. After the supplication Guru Granth Sahib was opened at random by the Granthi (priest) and then he read the commandment (*Vaak*):

ਸੋਰਠਿ ਮਹਲਾ ੫ ॥ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਕੀ ਸਰਣਿ ਸਗਲ ਭੈ ਲਾਥੇ ਦੁਖ ਬਿਨਸੇ ਸੁਖੁ ਪਾਇਆ ॥
(SGGS, P.615)

Under the Lord's refuge all fears have fled; sorrows annihilated and joy obtained.

As he listened to this Vaak, Bhai Kirpal Singh was fully convinced that Satguru's blessing was with him and that he would not have any problem in discharging his new duty successfully.

On reaching the Dera he went to the congregation hall and according to his daily routine opened Guru Granth Sahib and started the morning congregational meeting. After the meeting he accompanied some students to the kitchen to prepare the breakfast. Then as was his daily assignment, he took breakfast for Baba Uttam Singh to his room. While Baba Ji was taking his breakfast Bhai Kirpal Singh mentioned to him that Sant Amir Singh had charged him with the responsibility to conduct the class of exegesis of Guru Granth Sahib. Baba Ji was very pleased to hear this. He said, "You are a very accomplished disciple of Sant Amir Singh. We have full confidence that you would be able to carry out this duty successfully. I pray to Satguru to grant you capacity and ability to do so".

All the disciples at the Dera had already come to know that the class which had been suspended because of the surgery of Sant Amir Singh was going to start again and that Bhai Kirpal Singh was going to be the teacher in place of Sant Amir Singh Ji. Therefore they all assembled in the class room a few minutes before 10:00 AM, which was the regular time for the class. Bhai Kirpal Singh entered the class at ten and bade "Waheguru Ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji ki Fateh" to the class. Before starting to teach he asked all students to join him in saying a supplication to Satguru for a speedy recovery of Sant Amir Singh Ji. After the supplication everyone took his seat and the lesson was started from where Sant Amir Singh had left:

ਤੁਖਾਰੀ ਛੰਤ ਮਹਲਾ ੧ ਬਾਰਹ ਮਾਹਾ ੴ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥ (SGGS, P.1107)

Bhai Kirpal Singh started with the background of the composition "Barah Maha" or twelve months of Guru Nanak Dev Ji. He explained that Guru Nanak has symbolically portrayed human soul as the bride and Akaal Purakh as the groom. The bride (by taking birth in the human form) is separated from the groom and is eagerly waiting when it will meet the groom again and enjoy the bliss of union. In this composition, Guru

Nanak beautifully describes the pangs of separation expressed over a period of one full year, by the bride, as the season changes from month to month. After giving this background Bhai Kirpal Singh started explaining the meaning of each sentence.

At the end of the class Bhai Kirpal Singh allowed an open period for questions. One of the students asked, "In Gurbani the word 'Amrit' comes many times and is mostly used for God's Name. Also it is repeatedly emphasized that by drinking the Lord's Name, nectar, one can attain to Akaal Purakh. On the other hand Guru Gobind Singh gave us another Amrit which is 'Khande di Pauhul'; which can be prepared in any Gurdwara by five "Piaaras" (beloved ones) and anyone who is desirous of it can take it. It is said to have the capability of transforming meek ones into fearless lion-like persons. Could you kindly clarify how the Amrit mentioned in Guru Granth Sahib can be prepared and administered"? Bhai Kirpal Singh humbly said, "In the past Sant Amir Singh Ji has often given discourses on various related subjects. I do not claim to have knowledge anywhere close to him. However, I will try to answer your question to the best of my ability.

So saying he illustrated by quoting from Guru Granth Sahib that Amrit resided within oneself. Then he gave numerous quotations to show how one could reach within oneself where Amrit was present and quaff and enjoy it. Some pertinent quotations are given below:

WHERE DOES THE AMRIT RESIDE?

ਮ: ੩॥ ਘਰ ਹੀ ਮਹਿ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਭਰਪੂਰੁ ਹੈ ਮਨਮੁਖਾ ਸਾਦੁ ਨ ਪਾਇਆ॥
ਜਿਉ ਕਸਤੂਰੀ ਮਿਰਗੁ ਨ ਜਾਣੈ ਭ੍ਰਮਦਾ ਭਰਮਿ ਭੁਲਾਇਆ॥

(SGGS, P.644)

Within home (self) is a storeful of Amrit, of which the egoists cannot taste the joy.
As the musk-deer, unaware of the musk within, keeps wandering in misconception.

ਬਾਹਰਿ ਢੂਢਨ ਤੇ ਛੂਟਿ ਪਰੇ ਗੁਰਿ ਘਰ ਹੀ ਮਾਹਿ ਦਿਖਾਇਆ ਥਾ॥
ਅਨਭਉ ਅਚਰਜ ਰੂਪੁ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਪੇਖਿਆ ਮੇਰਾ ਮਨੁ ਛੋਡਿ ਨ ਕਤਹੂ ਜਾਇਆ ਥਾ॥੧॥
ਮਾਨਕੁ ਪਾਇਓ ਰੇ ਪਾਇਓ ਹਰਿ ਪੂਰਾ ਪਾਇਆ ਥਾ ॥

ਮੋਲਿ ਅਮੋਲੁ ਨ ਪਾਇਆ ਜਾਈ ਕਰਿ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਗੁਰੂ ਦਿਵਾਇਆ ਥਾ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ॥
ਅਦਿਸਟੁ ਅਗੋਚਰੁ ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ ਮਿਲਿ ਸਾਧੂ ਅਕਥੁ ਕਥਾਇਆ ਥਾ॥
ਅਨਹਦ ਸਬਦੁ ਦਸਮ ਦੁਆਰਿ ਵਜਿਓ ਤਹ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਨਾਮੁ ਚੁਆਇਆ ਥਾ॥

(SGGS, P.1002)

We are released from seeking the Lord outside; the Master has granted His vision within the self. We beheld the Lord's marvellous form by spontaneous illumination, deserting which my mind strays nowhere. I have found the jewel; found the Lord perfection incarnate; invaluable, for no price can he be attained- the master in his grace has favoured us with Him. (Pause) Invisible, unknowable is the Supreme Being, the inexpressible is expounded in the company of holy people. As the unstruck melody was sounded in the tenth chamber, did Amrita of Name ooze.

HOW TO REACH THE AMRIT?

ਨਾਨਕ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਮਨੈ ਮਾਹਿ ਪਾਈਐ ਗੁਰ ਪਰਸਾਦਿ॥
ਤਿਨ੍ਹੀ ਪੀਤਾ ਰੰਗ ਸਿਉ ਜਿਨ੍ਹ ਕਉ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਆਦਿ॥ (SGGS, P.1238)

Says Nanak, Amrit resides within and can be attained with the Master's grace;
Only those quaff it in joy on whose destiny it is recorded since primal time.

ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਰਸੁ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਚੁਆਇਆ॥ ਦਸਵੈ ਦੁਆਰਿ ਪ੍ਰਗਟੁ ਹੋਇ ਆਇਆ॥
ਤਹ ਅਨਹਦ ਸਬਦ ਵਜਹਿ ਧੁਨਿ ਬਾਣੀ ਸਹਜੇ ਸਹਜਿ ਸਮਾਈ ਹੇ॥

(SGGS, P.1069)

The holy Preceptor has made Amrit-elixir drip, whereby at the tenth chamber the Lord became manifest. There the tune of unstruck melody is played, and the self spontaneously absorbed in serenity.

All students were extremely impressed by the vast knowledge of Gurbani as well as the way of teaching of Giani Kirpal Singh[3] which made the students perfectly at ease. It now became routine that after the regular class of exegesis of Gurbani, some time was set aside in which he answered any questions on Sikh philosophy and theology. His reputation spread quickly throughout the Dera and Baba Uttam Singh was overjoyed to hear that the tradition of Gurbani explanation was being maintained at such a high level by Giani Kirpal Singh.

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[3] From that day on all students started addressing Bhai Kirpal Singh as Giani Ji.

When Sant Amir Singh was recovering after his operation in the hospital, one day Baba Uttam Singh asked Giani Kirpal Singh that he would like to visit Sant Ji. Giani Kirpal Singh immediately arranged for a rickshaw and the two went to the hospital. When Baba Ji entered the room where Sant Amir Singh was lying and the latter saw his teacher coming, he immediately got up from his bed, walked a few steps and bent to touch the feet of Baba Uttam Singh. The doctors had strictly forbidden Sant Ji from moving out of his bed because the incision that had been stitched after his operation needed a few days to heal. This exertion of getting up, walking and bending resulted in the opening of the wound again and it started bleeding.

The doctor was called immediately who applied fresh stitches and closed the wound. He said that there was no reason to worry because the wound would still heal satisfactorily though it may take some more time. Giani Kirpal Singh then brought Baba Uttam Singh back to the Dera. From that day on he added a daily trip to the hospital to his already crowded daily routine.

Sant Amir Singh remained in the hospital for a month. Then he insisted that he be brought to the Dera though the doctor had suggested that he should stay there for another few days. It seems that Sant Ji had realized that his days were numbered and he wanted to spend these few days at the *Dera*. He was therefore brought back to the Dera by Giani Kirpal Singh in the first week of October, 1954.

Soon after coming back to the Dera, one day Sant Amir Singh called Giani Kirpal Singh to his room and said, "I have only a few more days left in this world. I am quite satisfied and pleased with the way you have been running the affairs of the Dera and carrying out the duty of teaching the traditional exegesis of Guru Granth Sahib. Therefore I can go in peace now. I pray to Satguru to give you capacity and ability to carry out these duties for a long time to come. Please take good care of my Guru,

Baba Uttam Singh Ji, who is over one hundred years old now, after I am gone". Giani Kirpal Singh answered humbly, "You are my revered teacher and your word is my command. I will try to act according to your wishes to the best of my ability". Sant Amir Singh then said, "Please make arrangements for legal transfer of the property of the Dera in order to prevent any undue litigation after I am gone".

The next day Giani Kirpal Singh got all the necessary legal papers prepared by a lawyer and brought them to Sant Amir Singh. Sant Ji signed all the papers and the signatures of witnesses were also affixed. Within a few days, towards the beginning of the third week of October, 1954 Sant Amir Singh discarded his mortal body to merge into the Infinite:

> ਜਿਉ ਜਲ ਮਹਿ ਜਲੁ ਆਇ ਖਟਾਨਾ ॥ ਤਿਉ ਜੋਤੀ ਸੰਗਿ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਮਾਨਾ ॥
>
> (SGGS, P.278)
>
> *(He) merged his light into the (supreme) light, as water mingles into water.*

Giani Kirpal Singh performed all the rites of passage for Sant Amir Singh Ji like a son does for his father. On November 2, 1954, Sants of various denominations gathered at the Dera for the completion of Akhand Paath of Guru Granth Sahib in the memory of Sant Amir Singh and at the end of the ceremony tied the traditional turban on the head of Giani Kirpal Singh symbolically indicating him to be the heir of Sant Amir Singh and the Sant-incharge of the Dera. Robes of honour from many religious institutions including Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple) were also presented to Giani Ji.

All the honours given by various Sant denominations and Sikh organizations, however, did not make any difference in the attitude of Sant Kirpal Singh. He was humble as ever and continued to discharge all his duties including the management of the Dera and Gurbani exegesis class with the same enthusiasm and sincerity. Actually he was now more careful in personally taking care of Baba Uttam Singh Ji.

Soon his reputation as an excellent teacher of Gurbani, who had a vast knowledge of Sikh history as well as Hindu mythology and a deep understanding of metaphors and allegories used by the Gurus and various Bhagats, spread in the Sikh world. As a result many new students started coming from all over the country. Many already well-trained *parcharaks* (preachers) and Sants also attended his class and came out with unusually difficult and provocative questions. All went satisfied and full of praise for the knowledge and humility of Sant Kirpal Singh.

The first complete exegesis of Guru Granth Sahib by Sant Kirpal Singh came about near the Diwali festival. At this occasion he invited many famous preachers and Sants. A large number of devotees gathered to listen to the many excellent discourses on Gurbani by all these learned speakers. But everyone went convinced that the Gurbani discourse by Sant Kirpal Singh was the most impressive because of its depth and the lucidity of language. Even a lay person could easily understand, his explanations of even the most difficult passages of Gurbani because he gave appropriate examples from Sikh history and, whenever necessary, Hindu mythology.

Under the able guidance of Sant Kirpal Singh the *Dera* progressed quite satisfactorily. All concerned were happy and thus the time passed by without any unusual incident. One day after the class when Sant Kirpal Singh was going to his room to take rest he saw his mother, Mata Satnam Kaur, coming towards him. He stood and then walked towards her, touched her feet and requested her to accompany him to his room. In his room he urged her to sit on the bed and he himself sat near her feet at the floor. Then he asked her if everyone at home was in good health and spirits. The mother said, "With the grace of Guru Ram Das Ji everyone is doing fine". Then she said, "I have been coming to the Dera to listen to your Gurbani discourses and have always felt proud to see the great progress made by my son. Today it is more than twenty seven years since you left your home and came here. All these years you have not set foot in your home even once. We also did not insist that you should come because you had taken a vow to dedicate your entire life to the Dera. Now that your teacher, Sant Amir Singh Ji has passed away and you are the incharge of the Dera I have come here with a request that you should please grace the occasion of the conclusion of Akhand Paath that we are going to have at our home. You do visit the homes of other devotees of the *Dera* on such occasions and we are also devotees of this *Dera*. So please come and give your blessings".

Mata Satnam Kaur was very cautious in making her request. She

refrained from expressing her worldly relation of mother with Sant Kirpal Singh because she was afraid that it might have a negative effect. She still remembered that years ago when the elder brother of Sant Kirpal Singh was getting married, she and her husband (Bhai Partap Singh) had asked him to come home and attend the celebrations, but he had flatly refused at that time. Not only that but when they had arranged the marriage party to come to the Dera for obeisance, Bhai Kirpal Singh had even refused to come out of his room to meet his brother. He had frankly told his parents that once they had donated their son to the *Dera* they had absolutely no claim on him.

However, today when Mata Satnam Kaur requested Sant Ji as the incharge of the Dera and not as her son, he replied, "I will request Baba Uttam Singh Ji and hope that he will accompany me. Also if you wish, some of my students will participate in the recitation of Akhand Paath. They have knowledge to recite the Gurbani correctly". Mata Satnam Kaur was overjoyed and said, "It will be our good fortune if we could have correct recitation of Guru Granth Sahib at our home". She then left in a hurry to break this happy news to her family[4].

Sant Kirpal Singh then went to Baba Uttam Singh to get his permission to participate in the Akhand Paath at her mother's place. Baba Ji was pleased to hear the request of this respectful (grand) disciple who, in spite of being the incharge of the Dera, was so humble. He said, "You are the incharge here now; do whatever you think is proper. I have full confidence in your ability and judgement".

On the day the Akhand Paath was to be concluded, Sant Kirpal Singh reached his mother's place along with all his disciples (Baba Uttam Singh was too old and weak to leave the Dera). All relatives who had come to attend this occasion very respectfully welcomed him and his entourage. Towards the end of the ceremony, after the Keertan, at the request of the congregation Sant Ji gave Gurbani discourse which immensely impressed everyone. After taking the Langar he returned to the Dera.

Within a few years the reputation of Sant Kirpal Singh, as the exegesis of Guru Granth Sahib according to the tradition started by Guru

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[4] Bhai Partap Singh had passed away some time back.

Gobind Singh Ji[5], spread far and wide and he started getting many requests to publish translation of individual Banis like Japu Ji, Bhagat Bani etc.

Sant Kirpal Singh agreed to this proposal and within a year wrote the traditional translation of Japu Ji. This translation, when published, was considered by many learned Sikhs as the "tape-recorded" version of what Guru Gobind Singh had given. It became so popular that soon a second edition was published.

After such a resounding success of the translation of Japu Ji, Sant Kirpal Singh completed the translation of Bhagat Bani in a couple of years; which was also appreciated immensely and received eagerly by the Sikh masses.

Baba Uttam Singh was now one hundred ten years old. He was physically quite weak and therefore was confined, most of the time, to his room; but mentally he was very alert. He passed most of his time listening to Sukhmani Sahib recited by one of the disciples of Sant Kirpal Singh, who visited him as often as his busy schedule allowed. Sometimes he himself recited Sukhmani Sahib also; which Baba Uttam Singh liked very much. On May 30, 1961, when Baba Ji was listening to the Sukhmani Sahib recited by one of the students and Sant Kirpal Singh was also present there, he discarded his mortal body peacefully to merge in Akaal

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[5] According to Sikh tradition, Guru Gobind Singh, after leaving Anandpur and going through Chamkaur and the jungle of Machhiwara, reached Talwandi Sabo (now Damdama Sahib) and stayed there for about a year. He called Bhai Mani Singh and Baba Deep Singh and started dictating to them Guru Granth Sahib of the present form (comprising the compositions of Guru Tegh Bahadur also). The two scribes kept on writing as the tenth Master dictated. Guru Gobind Singh also went on explaining the meaning of the dictated hymns the same day in the congregation. After the project was completed the Guru sent Bhai Mani Singh to Amritsar as the care taker of Harimandir. Bhai Mani Singh set up his Dera at Amritsar and started teaching the meaning of Guru Granth Sahib as he had learned from the tenth Master, to students who wanted to become Granthis or Preachers. This tradition has continued ever since and the Dera is known as the "Taksaal" or mint because here one could get the authentic traditional meanings of Guru Granth Sahib as taught by Guru Gobind Singh. The lineage at this Taksaal ran as follows:

Bhai Mani Singh–Bhai Amar Singh–Bhai Chanda Singh–Bhai Hazara Singh–Bhai Daya Singh–Sant Bhagwan Singh–Sant Amir Singh–Sant Kirpal Singh–Sant Makhan Singh. Also from Sant Bhagwan Singh another branch started: Baba Harnam Singh–Sant Bishan Singh Murala–Sant Sunder Singh Bhinder–Sant Gurbachan Khalsa.

Purakh. Next day according to Sikh tradition his body was given a bath and then clad in new clothes. Then it was placed in a palanquin and taken out in the form of a procession to the cremation ground. Thousands of devotees came to have the last *'darshan'* (sight) of Baba Ji and pay their homage. At the same time the recitation of Sukhmani Sahib was started at the Dera which continued for four days, till June 4, 1961, when his ashes were collected. Sehaj Paath of Guru Granth Sahib was started which was completed on June 12, 1961. On that day a large number of devotees came to attend the last rites of Baba Ji. After the conclusion of the Paath and the final supplication Sant Kirpal Singh took the remains to Haridwar to drop them in the river Ganges. On his return an Akhand Paath was started which concluded on June 20, 1961. A large number of Sants of different denominations came from all over the country to attend this occasion. At the end of the Bhog ceremony the leaders of the groups of Sants conferred the title of Mahant on Sant Kirpal Singh by tying the ceremonial turban on his head and presenting him with a broom and a basket according to the tradition of the Seva Panthi sect[6].

Sant Kirpal Singh because of his vast knowledge, even temper, broadmindedness, humility and unparalleled devotion to Guru Granth Sahib, commanded great respect not only among his disciples and congregation members but also among the elite of the Sadhu Samaj (the society of Sants).

Following the unparalleled success of his two publications (translations of Japu Ji and the Bhagat Bani), requests to translate the entire Guru Granth Sahib started pouring in. Finally Sant Kirpal Singh started on this marathon project when some close devotees assured him that their services would always be at his disposal all through the project. The noteworthy names of the devotees who gave their untiring support and service are:

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[6] Seva Panthi sect which literally means service brigade was started by Bhai Kanahiya, a devout Sikh of Guru Gobind Singh. He was given the duty of providing water to the wounded soldiers in the battle ground. Some Sikhs noticed that Bhai Kanahiya gave water not only to the wounded Sikh soldiers but even to the enemy soldiers also. They complained to Guru Ji who called Bhai Kanahiya to verify if the complaint against him was true. He humbly replied, "Sire, according to the way you have taught me I see God's own image in everyone and therefore cannot discriminate against someone simply because he is an enemy fighter". Guru Gobind Singh was so pleased with this answer that he gave him a first aid kit and told him to continue the noble work of saving lives. The broom and basket symbolize the spirit of service.

> Bhai Tara Singh Banker and Bhai Harbhajan Singh deed-writer and his family. The translation, which took eleven years to complete, was published in ten volumes; the tenth and the last volume being published in 1981. This translation had a great impact on the Sikh missionary work. A large number of preachers (*parcharaks*) used it to understand and then preach Gurmat philosophy.

As already pointed out, the lineage of the Taksaal of Bhai Mani Singh Branched out after Sant Bhagwan Singh (see the previous footnote). The torch bearer of this branch contemporary to Sant Kirpal Singh was Sant Gurbachan Singh Khalsa of Bhinder. He was a very pious and devout Sikh and at the same time, a preacher per excellence of Gurmat philosophy. Once he fell seriously ill and was brought to Guru Tegh Bahadur hospital, Amritsar. When Sant Kirpal Singh heard about this he immediately took some of his disciples with him to the hospital carrying enough food for the disciples who had accompanied Sant Gurbachan Singh. On reaching the hospital he was taken to the room where Sant Gurbachan Singh was admitted. On seeing Sant Kirpal Singh Sant Gurbachan Singh was very happy. He got up and the two "Gurbhais" (brothers belonging to the same lineage of Sants) very cordially met for the first time. Sant Kirpal Singh said, "The Dera belongs as much to you as it does to me. Therefore, please feel free to let us know if there is anything you need. Also, as soon as you are out of the hospital, please do spend a few days with us". Sant Gurbachan Singh was overwhelmed by this expression of love from Sant Kirpal Singh and said, "I am already indebted to you for all that you have done for us. With your love and good wishes I am sure I will soon be well enough to visit the Dera and avail of your generous hospitality. I cannot disregard your words because I see in you the spirit of Sant Amir Singh Ji from whom my teacher Sant Sunder Singh Bhinderwale learned the exegesis of Guru Granth Sahib".

After this visit Sant Kirpal Singh did everything within his reach to make the stay of Sant Gurbachan Singh in the hospital as comfortable as possible. After he got discharged from the hospital, Sant Gurbachan Singh came with his entourage and stayed at the Dera for some time.

In 1981 Sant Kirpal Singh fell sick with heart problem. He was admitted in the hospital where he was treated for a few days and then allowed to go back to the Dera. However, the doctors gave express instructions that he should cut down his work-load which included taking daily class of exegesis of Guru Granth Sahib, Gurbani discourse in the morning congregational meeting and management of the Dera. But Sant Ji refused to stop either the exegesis class or the morning Gurbani discourse saying that his very life depended on them. The doctors kept a close watch on his health and whenever they noticed even the slightest problem they forced him to spend a few days in the hospital to take a forced rest. As soon as he returned, however, he went back to his strenuous routine. Once he had to leave the Dera building for a few days because it needed some necessary repairs. He then moved to the house of his close devotee, Bhai Harbhajan Singh, deed writer. Even at his house he continued his the daily exegesis class as well as attending the morning congregational meeting where he gave regular Gurbani discourse.

In May, 1984 Sant Kirpal Singh fell seriously ill and was admitted in Wariam Singh Hospital[7]. The month of May of 1984 was of extreme hardship on the citizens of Amritsar because of the atrocities of Indian reserve police and army (in June, 1984 it precipitated in the form of "Operation Blue Star" in which thousands of pilgrims to Darbar Sahib on the occasion of celebration of fifth Guru's martyrdom day were martyred). Curfew was imposed and as a result sometime even the doctors could not reach the hospital. On the night of May 22, the condition of Sant Ji worsened but there was no doctor available in the hospital. Sant Ji was not allowed from his bed but that night the attendant walked him to the toilet. This was the last time he got up. Within a few hours after this he discarded his mortal body to merge in the Infinite.

It was extremely difficult to travel in Punjab those days. The Government of India had imposed strict restrictions, specially, on Sikhs, to go to their sacred places like Amritsar. In spite of all the problems thousands of devotees managed to reach Amritsar to have the last *Darshan* (sight) of Sant Kirpal Singh and join in the procession to the cremation ground. Innumerable robes of honour were presented by various religious organizations and Deras of various sects of Sants. According to the tradition, after the cremation all religious rites were performed at the Dera and finally his ashes were taken to Haridwar to be immersed in the river Ganges.

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[7] This hospital was started by Dr. Santokh Singh and his brother Beant Singh in the memory of their father, Wariam Singh, kiln owner. The foundation stone of this hospital was laid by Sant Kirpal Singh.

Sant Kirpal Singh was an even-tempered, ever-smiling person. He had such a pleasing personality that whoever met him even once carried a long lasting pleasant impression of him. In addition to a vast knowledge of the Sikh and Hindu scriptures, his method of explanation of even the most difficult passages of Gurbani was such that the listener not only could easily understand but enjoyed every word of it. He was a very generous man. Over two hundred hungry people daily ate at the Dera. Whenever possible he also gave clothes to needy people. No one ever saw him losing temper even when some cynics asked him some irrelevant questions. He kept on explaining with patience until the questioner was fully satisfied. His class of exegesis of Guru Granth Sahib became so popular that in addition to men, who until recently were the only attenders, women also started joining the class. His traditional (Sampardaaee) translation of Guru Granth Sahib helped many preachers (*Parcharaks*) to be immensely and thus became instrumental in spreading the message of Gurbani to innumerable Sikhs as well as non-Sikhs.

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Later he moved to the aerospace industry and has over thirty research papers and sixty world-wide patents to his name. Yet his real love has always been in the dispensation of the Sikh values to the Sikh youth. He conducted two international "Sikh Renaissance Conferances" and is one of the founding directors of "the Sikh Welfare Foundation of North America". He has written and edited several books on Sikhism and has published many ariticles on topics of concern to Sikh youth in the west. He has been doing Kirtan and Katha Seva in various Gurdwaras of Southern California for the past thirty five years and is the reecpient of the HGS International Award for public service.

Books Published:

1. Some Aspects of Sikh History, a Fresh Look.

2. Sau Suwal (English translation and commentary of the

book by Principal Satbir Singh).

3. Guru Tegh Bahadur, the Apostle of Human Rights.

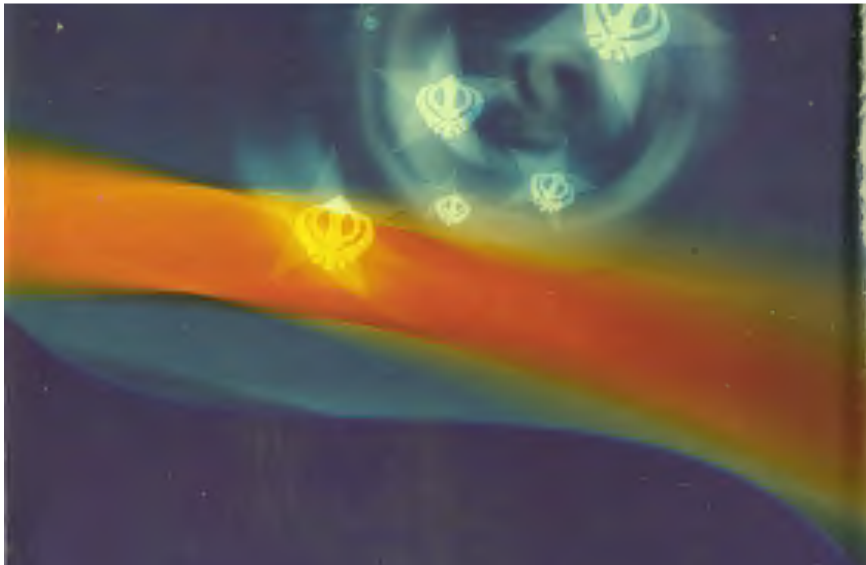
Books Edited:

1. Kiv Sachiara Ho-eeai.

2. Oh My Mind.

3. Guru Nanak Dev to Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

4, Thus Says Sri Guru Granth Sahib.



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